

Star-Crossed

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/61104859) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/61104859>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/M , M/M
Fandom:	Ratboy's Kingdom (Web Series)
Relationships:	Fred/Old Fingerhead (Frenemies) , Captain Bob/Sue
Characters:	Fred , George , Captain Bob , Sue , Old Fingerhead , Young Mouthbottom
Additional Tags:	Family Drama , Mild Hurt/Comfort , Fred has PTSD , Action/Adventure , Bob is a Good Guy , But Fred Hates Him lol , Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism , Sc-fi Shenanigans , Recreational Drug Use , Adult Humor , Mild Blood , Headcanon , Panic Attacks , Everyone Needs A Hug , Fights , Team Up , Developing Friendships , Redemption , Frenemies , Bickering
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Galactic Superheroes
Stats:	Published: 2024-12-05 Completed: 2025-04-25 Words: 29,800 Chapters: 15/15

Star-Crossed

by [Twisty_Little_Passages](#)

Summary

With a post-traumatic induced fear of losing his siblings, Fred struggles to control the emotions that push everyone away; especially Sue, who has to constantly deal with Fred's disapproval of her long-term relationship with Captain Bob, a now renowned space explorer, until it reaches a breaking point after he proposes to Sue.

And so, in the wake of family tensions, Fred will try to adapt to his own emotions and discover a new unexpected connection with an old adversary, Old Fingerhead, who unintentionally takes him on a journey see things in a different light.

I should also mention this is technically an AU where the happyman opera happened in universe and is not a loose reenactment of events as the official series implies, also due to all the headcanons and unofficial lore that I incorporated in how their powers work and such.

Notes

Takes place a couple years after the events on the Red Planet with the gang back in action.

Chapter 1: Space Chase

Fred's eyes flashed a spectrum of worry. The flickering hues, constantly shifting with his emotional state, reflected vividly onto the cockpit dashboard as the Galactic Friends' ship hurtled through the pink twilight sky of yet another alien city in need of saving; a floating metropolis, bathed in neon lights and heavy air traffic.

He gripped his safety belt tightly, feeling his heart beat against the turbulence. Cargo ships loomed around him like metal behemoths with their hulls glistening from the humid atmosphere. The ship weaved between them, each twist and turn sending colorful warnings through the fibers of Fred's suit.

"Darn pirates! Don't lose sight of 'em, George!" he shouted above the whirring engines and distant explosions.

His brother, George, sat in the pilots chair next to him. The hulking four-armed alien locked his sights on the thieving ship speeding ahead.

These weren't ordinary thieves. These pirates had been systematically raiding planets for essential resources and equipment, enhancing their ship to become nearly untraceable. Each successful heist made them bolder, more dangerous. The chase ignited a fiery concentration within Fred. Each second stretched taut; failure was not an option.

Fred's superpower—his special sense—stirred within him. He could practically taste the pirates' reckless glee, taunting him whilst they darted between tight traffic, gambling with the innocent lives of blindsided civilians. The empath squinted, focusing through the emotional noise to discern the next move of their quarry.

"Left! They're going to turn left!"

The moment Fred spoke the ship veered sharply, dodging the enemy's laser beams that zipped past. He winced, feeling each rush of emotion from the city below come crashing against his consciousness like waves against a cliff.

Then he caught a glimpse of a crumbling sector fly past. The remnants of a once-bustling marketplace, now a whisper of what it once was. Fred shut his eyes and inhaled deeply to pacify himself. Distant memories of such destruction clawed at him, leaving a sharp sting.

"Fred," George's deep voice breached through, grounding his brother briefly. "Are you alright, buddy?"

The gentle giant's concern blanketed around Fred, and amidst the chaos, he sensed a focal point: the steady drumming of George's heartbeat, reliable and reassuring. He latched onto it as a lifeline, yet each skip of his brother's heart only reminded him of what he stood to lose.

"Don't worry about me," Fred replied breathily, straightening his shoulders. "Just stay focused on those *lunatics*."

They needed a plan. A way to outsmart their foes. Fred found himself wishing Sue were with them. Their sister's pacifying harmonies would have been invaluable right now, but he couldn't hold onto that thought. The city's deluge of emotions sang louder in his mind, blurring the lines between his own thoughts and the collective terror of those below.

"N-now, right!" Fred pointed, and with a breathless twist, they veered off-course just as the pirates executed a tight maneuver, making his torso flare up yellows of anxiety. "Darn it!"

"Sorry, brother! Your little light show is a bit distracting." As he explained, George repositioned the ship back towards their target.

George's four arms moved in a synchronized flow: one hand readied at the main controls, another reached for the defense systems while the others deftly adjusted the ship's trajectory.

"Faster, George! They're getting away!"

"Hold tight! I'm working on it," George bellowed back with a determined grin, his carefree spirit showing even in the heat of pursuit.

Fred, on the other hand, painfully pinched his temples, tuning between the pirates as if he were a radio searching for a clear signal.

"Left! Left!"

"Got it."

The ship swerved left where the shadows of a colossal skyscraper colony shrouded them in its welcome, their mirrored facades glimmering in the setting sun only for the pirates to blast them apart. Fred's stomach dropped as he mentally braced himself against the rapid-fire images of disaster: metal tearing, glass shattering. Their lives—their purpose, all reduced to smithereens.

"Watch out! You're going to—"

"Hold on!"

Fred felt the world tilt as George wrestled with the controls to roll the ship on its side between two tight buildings. The wing clipped a window, nearly spinning them out of control alongside broken glass. In that moment, the empath ceased all function under a bombardment of primal sensations. It was too much. He couldn't breathe.

"*WHY CAN'T YOU JUST FOCUS!?*" The words spilled out before he could contain them, firing like a bullet with George caught in the crossfire.

"Hey! I'm doing my best!" George shot back, yet still holding onto that thin thread of optimism. "It's just a flesh wound—we'll be fine!"

Continuing the pursuit, the ship dipped and zigzagged through a concrete canyon before zipping above spires that reached out like the fingers of some giant, eager to pluck them from

the sky. George yanked the yoke, dodging another set of laser beams as they pushed through the smoggy clouds that gated the city's outskirts.

They descended off the edge of the metropolis like a waterfall, twin trails of white smoke following them. As they fell and inched closer to their target, George yodeled unshakable confidence in the light of the open skies.

"Prepare the grapples!" Fred commanded.

With a flick of his wrist, George activated the grapples; a mechanical arm, sleek and swift, extended from the ship's belly—a serpent poised to strike. The whirring gears vibrated in the cockpit with a sound that promised imminent action.

"Deploying now."

The grapples shot forward in a blur of silver. Fred held his breath as seconds seemed to stretch and tear until finally the grapples dug its metal fangs into the pirates' hull. The tendrils wrapped around them and the impact reverberated through the clouds in claps of thunder.

"Got 'em!" George shouted, pumping his fist.

Fred leaned in, unable to stop the dread still bleeding from him. The pirates weren't surrendering so easily. Their vessel reeled upward violently trying to break free with momentum, forcing the heroes' ship to follow. After steadying themselves, the caged beasts thrashed against their binds stubborn in their attempts to escape.

"Come on," Fred urged, clawing into the leather of his seat.

The pirates' ship bucked under the strain and the grapples squeezed tighter in response. Fred's senses heightened with the acrid smell of overheating circuits, the taste of sweat on his lips.

"Can you lock them in?" His voice carried equal parts command and plea.

"Of course!" George's tongue poked between his teeth as he made minute adjustments. "Give me a second."

Another violent jolt rattled their ship. One moment of weakness and the pirates would slip away.

"George!"

"Just a little more..." George strained, easing them closer.

Then—a satisfying *click*.

"Okay, *now* we've got 'em!" A wide grin wiped away any evidence of stress from George's face.

Fred remained anchored beside his brother, catching his breath in shallow bursts. They had captured the pirates, yes, but something else still lurked in the depths of his claustrophobic

mind, waiting to break the surface.

Chapter 2: Before the Storm

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The air sizzled with the remnants of adrenaline as Fred and George descended into the floating city's docking bay, their ship now a battered sentinel of victory. They parked near the town hall on the outer rim of an artificial ecosystem, its titanium structure giving off an aura of power and authority in its pyramid-like design.

"Let's get these ruffians to the authorities," George boomed, though he carried a characteristic gentleness.

The spacecraft settled with a resonant metallic clang. When the door hissed open they were greeted by a dock bustling with uniformed officers and excited fans held at a safe distance by security barriers.

The brothers stepped out, followed by the shackled pirates whose faces were sullen and defeated. Onlookers gasped and spoke amongst themselves in a blend of admiration and curiosity.

"They're all yours, gentlemen," Fred declared to the waiting officers, pride barely hiding his irritation.

He pushed the pirates forward, letting the authorities take custody. Bodyguards replaced them, escorting the brothers up the town hall steps and away from the growing crowd. The captured criminals disappeared in another direction for processing.

"Good job, boys!" An exotic voice cut through a formation of guards.

The city's mayor approached, extending a royal purple tentacle adorned with bracelets that mirrored various solar systems.

"Your bravery has saved countless lives today," she spoke with sincerity. "Our city owes you a debt of gratitude."

"Just doing our part!" George clasped her aquatic arm with such enthusiasm he nearly knocked Fred off the stairs.

Fred felt the wave of butterflies radiating from his brother and fought back a twinge of nausea, rolling his eyes. The mayor simply giggled at George's eagerness.

"I simply cannot thank you enough." She shifted her gaze to Fred. "You've made the skies safer for us all."

"Yeah, well," Fred began, his words clipped as he swallowed a bitter taste. "It wasn't easy. Would have gone more smoothly if—"

"Fred," George interjected, his playful tone a familiar attempt to nudge his brother out of his mood.

"Right. Happy to help." Fred's deadpan expression betrayed his words.

His eyes scanned the crowd reflexively, searching for Sue despite knowing better. Her face smiled back at him only from the homemade signs waving among the screaming fans.

"Enjoy your moment," the mayor urged. "You deserve it. Heroism is more than just capturing criminals; It's about inspiring hope."

The platitude sprinkled the air between them, a predictable statement that seemed to slip through Fred's claws like sand.

"Oh, you are so right, Madam Mayor," George murmured dreamily, watching her depart with a dumb smile on his face.

Unable to bear the fluffy atmosphere any longer, Fred silently excused himself and slipped into the building behind them. Two guards immediately took up positions at the entrance, a silent guarantee that his privacy would remain undisturbed.

He paced the polished floor of the empty town hall, the cool surface beneath his feet in direct conflict with the burning inside. Each step resounded with the cadence of his racing thoughts, occasionally intercepted by the muffled noise of the crowd's emotions outside.

"She should have been here." The words escaped like steam from an overheated pot. "We *needed* her." His red eyes flared, darkening from crimson to maroon.

He massaged the back of his neck, feeling the tension ready to snap. "But she just had to go on that *stupid* space cruise," he spat. "With *him*."

Through his special sense, Fred could feel George outside, standing with the mayor before the media throng. His brother's emotional signature among the rest was unmistakable. Four muscular arms gestured with theatrical enthusiasm as he commanded the crowd's attention.

"Thank you, thank you!" he bellowed. "Yeah, it was pretty scary, but we're just doing our job—keeping the galaxy safe, ya know?"

Fred felt his younger brother's carefree demeanor radiate outward, a showcase of what he considered foolishness amid the flashing cameras. Yet the reporters hung on George's every word, captivated by his childlike wonder. He juggled their questions with natural bravado, his laughter a sweet melody that lightened the mood.

"No, we didn't eat the pirates!" he joked, drawing chuckles from the crowd.

A bittersweet smile tugged at Fred's lips despite himself. George had come a long way from that lonely, reckless monster stranded on the Red Planet, desperate for companionship. A pang of guilt, for failing to match his brother's spirit, stabbed him; for allowing personal worries to eclipse what should have been their moment of triumph.

He wandered deeper into the council chamber, staring at the communicator around his wrist. He'd sent what felt like a hundred messages already and each one was met with silence. Still, Fred continued to pace until the sounds from outside grew louder, merging into white noise that overwhelmed him.

When the door creaked open behind him, it felt as though the entire universe had suddenly flooded into the room. A guard stood there, waving nervously.

"What is it?" Fred barked, impatience thick in his throat.

"Um, your sister is here to see you, sir."

The excitement was unfiltered when Fred bolted through the doors. Relief evident when he saw her standing there, waving gracefully at the crowd. But the feeling of reassuring warmth quickly dissipated when he spotted Captain Bob, her beloved, standing right beside her.

The songstress' yellow skin practically glowed a mystical radiance, her forest-green hair flowing behind her like ribbons of emerald silk. Bob's mint-colored locks ruffled in the artificial breeze, earthly brown eyes fixed adoringly on his girlfriend.

"I still can't believe we got caught up in that meteor shower," Sue said, her violet eyes bright with the memory. "It was so beautiful, I just couldn't look away."

Bob's hearty chuckle cut through the spaceport's commotion. "Know the feeling," he replied, pulling her close. "Happens every time I look at you."

"Charmer," Sue giggled as she traced a finger along his flushed cheek.

They moved along the spaceport in their own blissful bubble, oblivious to the prying glances. The sharp tang of interstellar fuel mingled in the air, but Sue only registered Bob's cologne—that signature hint of stardust and adventure.

"You know," Bob murmured against her, "I think I found something more beautiful than that comet of diamonds I've been tracking." He mused alive with wonder, reminiscing a previous expedition of his.

Sue's eyelashes fluttered playfully. "Oh? And what might that be, Captain?"

Bob's reply was drowned by a nearby ship's engines firing, but the teasing look on his face and her blushing reaction needed no words. Unfortunately, when they approached the polished white stairs of the town hall, Sue's smile vanished.

Fred stood at the top with his arms crossed, red eyes blazing like dying stars. His special sense prickled and his body shuddered momentarily, clearly overwhelmed by the affection oozing from the couple. They stopped a few steps below him, listening as he managed a stoic voice to address them.

"*Susan*," he hissed with a mask of indifference. "A little late for last-second heroics, don't you think?"

Sue's brow furrowed. "Fred? Is everything alright? We just got back from—"

"I know where you've been," Fred's stubby antlers bent behind his head. "Gallivanting across the cosmos while *we* needed you here."

Bob stepped forward then. "Now, hold on—"

"Stay out of this, *Captain*," Fred cut him off with an extended arm, eyes flashing with literal anger. "You have no reason to even be here. Why don't you just go chase another pointless expedition and leave us be?!"

Bob flinched under the darkness of Fred's shadow, prompting Sue's confusion to harden into a defensive flare. She stepped between them, grabbing both men by their arms.

"That's it," she growled. "Inside. Now."

The trio stumbled through the ornate doors, the city noise falling away behind them. Fred's eyebrows knotted tightly, arms refusing to uncross as she dragged him into the cavernous foyer. With a final push from his sister, his heels squeaked defiance against the marble floor.

"What's gotten into you?" Sue poked her brother's chest. "We were only gone for a day. We had an agreement, remember? You said to '*go ahead and have fun*'. Something me and Bob never get to do without you hovering over us, might I add." She remarked those last words with a pointed murmur.

Fred's suit pulsed with agitated colors. "A lot can happen in a day. While you were off playing lovebirds, we had a crisis. I never agreed for you to neglect your duties!"

"You seemed to have handled it just fine without me." She placed a hand on her hip.

"Sue," Fred straightened, cheeks puffing. "If something were to happen to you out there and... if I couldn't—if you—" He shuddered before his tone shifted to something more bitter. "But of course, your luxury cruise takes priority over such things, correct?"

Bob placed a gentle hand on Fred's glowing shoulder. "Fred, I'm so sorry. If I'd known—"

"Of course you didn't know. *You* were too busy whisking my sister away from her responsibilities."

Sue's buttercream skin flushed into amber. "Well I'm here now! And I'm willing to help in any way I can, but you can't expect me to be available every second of my life."

"You made an *oath*, Sue! To protect the galaxy no matter the cost. There is no room for anything else!"

Bob's gaze darted between the siblings as the air in the town hall seemed to thicken with years of unresolved issues. The standoff broke at the sound of the door swinging open followed by a jovial howl.

"Sue! Bob! I'm so happy to see you guys!" George burst into the room, all four arms outstretched.

Before anyone could react, he swept the couple into a bear hug, his strength easily lifting them off their feet and spinning them around. Sue winced, forcing a smile as she met Fred's gaze over George's shoulder; a silent agreement passing between them.

"Hey George," she managed, voice strained with her face pressed against Bob's. "Wonderful to see you too."

Fred dimmed himself, the angry colors of his suit fading to a standard green as he cleared his throat. "George, we were just discussing—"

"Oh, guess what?" George interrupted, setting the couple down with care. "The *lovely* mayor wants to give us a personal tour of the city! How cool is that?" His childlike enthusiasm bubbled over in a surprisingly high-pitched squeak.

Bob's face lit up with an audible gasp. "That sounds fantastic! What do you say, guys?"

Sue nodded courteously. "Of course. That would be lovely. Isn't that right, *Fredrick*?"

Fred hesitated, then surrendered with a sigh. "Fine," he croaked. The single word carrying the weight of his reluctant concession.

Chapter End Notes

OH NO. Will Fred ruin the happy vibes? Does George got that rizz?? Stay tuned!

UPDATE 04/03: this chapter has been merged with chapter 3 and rewritten a bit, since they are the weakest, I have combined them into a slightly better chapter! yay for me!

Chapter 3: Overture

Chapter Notes

09/13/2025 UPDATE: This chapter has been revised and expanded. Though it's still not quite where I want it, I'd rather move on—but MAYBE I'll give other chapters the same treatment sometime since I feel like my writing has improved somewhat!

Sue drew in the crisp evening air, soothing her lungs from the burn of irritation. She slid into the tour guide's shuttle and settled among the group, all too aware of Fred's judgmental gaze drilling into her back. She curled her hands into fists, forbidding herself to let him ruin this for her.

As they swept through the city's glowing arteries, the holographic tour guide drew their attention to historical landmarks; the bones of ancient ruins that retold stories of the city's past. Bob soaked in every detail, fingers twitching over his old-earth camera unable to resist interrupting each stop with flashing pictures and lobbed questions. George matched his excitement, simply happy to be there.

"We are now entering the zoo, where we keep many of the galaxy's most endangered species!" the hologram announced, gesturing towards a miniature tropical paradise ahead of them.

"Ooh! Look over there! Things!" George cooed, pointing at what appeared to be a cross between a jellyfish and a tree.

Bob chuckled, snapping another photo. "I've never seen anything like it!" He turned to Sue. "What do you think, hun?"

Sue opened her mouth, but quickly shut it when Fred squeezed in their space. "I'm sure it's nothing compared to the exotic wonders on Bob's luxury cruise ship, right Sue?"

She frowned, biting her lip. "Actually, I was about to say how fascinating it is. But please, don't let me interrupt your insightful commentary," she spat, hoping he'd get the message.

But Fred's presence continued to simmer at the edge of every conversation. Between his barbs and her withering retorts, a silent duel raged through the cabin without subtlety. George and Bob, both wary of the undercurrent, shared quick, sheepish glances. Though the zoo's wide array of wildlife quickly swept the pair into a vortex of blissful distraction.

Throughout the tour, Sue found herself torn between marveling at her surroundings and seething at her brother's barely concealed hostility. By the end of it, she had sighed out her

entire air supply, watching George and Bob toy with the holographic guide, their waving hands causing it to glitch much to their giggly amusement.

"Maybe you two should just move into the zoo. You'd fit right in with all the other animals on display," Fred barked, prompting Sue to stealth-punch him in the arm.

"And that concludes our tour of the Floating City," chirped the hologram as it flickered back to its default stance. Its programming hiccupped before resetting. "Welcome to the Floating City, home to over three thousand species from across the galaxy..."

Fred's patience, already stretched tissue-thin, finally snapped. He bolted from his seat toward the shuttle door, his tan leathery skin mottled with patches of red. His fingers clawed at the handle, yanking it with enough force to tear it clean off—had it not been reinforced specifically to withstand such outbursts.

"Please wait for staff to open the door. Thanks for visiting!" blared an automated announcement, its cheerful tone a direct mockery of Fred's desperation.

He slammed his palm against the door. "Open, you blasted contraption!"

"Please wait for staff to open the door. Thanks for—"

"OH, CAN IT!" Fred roared and kicked the metal in frustrated surrender.

Ignoring everyone's stares, Fred quietly shuffled back into the nearest seat. He crossed his arms tightly across his chest, physically holding in what threatened to burst through.

Bob—after an encouraging nudge from George that nearly sent him sprawling—straightened his camera strap and made his way to the empty seat beside Fred. His round face was set in a hopeful expression, though sweat beaded at his hairline.

"So..." Bob began, offering a smile to the fuming alien who refused to look away from the door. "Beautiful city, isn't it? The architecture is really something."

Sue, recognizing the attempt, quietly moved to the opposite end of the shuttle. She pretended to be fascinated by a brochure, her forced gaze occasionally drifting toward the pair.

"I particularly liked that building shaped like a DNA strand," Bob continued. "Reminds me of uh... spirally-shaped things."

"Uh huh."

In the background, the hologram droned on. George had given up trying to mess with it and was now watching the Fred-Bob interaction with the rapt attention of someone witnessing a slow-motion crash.

"Anyway," Bob shifted in his seat, clearly sensing his strategy wasn't working. His eyes darted around for inspiration, landing briefly on Sue before he blurted out: "Have you ever been in love!?"

The question shot Fred to attention, his wide, color-shifting eyes tinged with something potentially dangerous.

"I mean," Bob rushed to delay his fate, "before Sue, I thought I knew what it was, but then—"

"Why would you ask me that?"

"I just thought... you know... common ground...?" Bob stammered.

"Love," Fred practically chewed and spat out the word. "What a waste. I have a galaxy to protect, Captain. Some of us have actual *purpose*."

Fred assumed his hostility would be enough to scare the human off. Bob, however, was nothing if not persistent.

"I just... I mean, someone like you must have admirers, right? Well, whoever ends up with you would be very lucky, I think." He gestured stiffly around Fred's space. "Strong jawline. Good... shoulders."

The shuttle fell into a silence so complete that even the hologram stopped to cringe. George's eyes grew twice as big, and Sue froze mid-page-turn, peeking over the paper.

Fred's glare could have melted the hull of a battleship. "Keep your compliments to yourself," he growled, ice coating every syllable.

Bob wilted under the pressure, shrinking into his seat. The tension in the shuttle had become nearly unbearable when Sue finally intervened, gliding forward with a grace that masked her internal panic.

"Don't take it personally," she said, draping her arms around Bob's neck. "Fred's only true love is his job. They've been in a committed relationship for years." Her tone was light, but it held a warning for her brother.

Fred snorted. "At least *my* relationship doesn't compromise everything."

"Nothing's being compromised," Bob interjected, finding his courage. "I admire your dedication to the Galactic Friends. It's one of the reasons I fell for your sister—she has that same passion."

Fred's eyes narrowed to crimson slits. The comment, seemingly genuine, only fueled his impatience. Bob, who was silently panicking again, struggled to change the subject before suddenly perking up with relocation.

The explorer sprang to his feet with a renewed click of his heels. From his pocket he produced four shimmering tickets. "I've, uh, been meaning to surprise you all with this!" he hurriedly announced. "I managed to get us exclusive early access to a showing of 'The Red Planet Tragedy: An Operatic Reenactment!'"

The sparkle of the tickets reflected in everyone's astonishment. Sue stood up, taking a closer look to confirm what she heard. "What—how... Bob, where in the world did you get these?"

"I kinda sorta mentioned it in passing to the mayor before the tour..." Bob waved the tickets around his face, using it like a fan. "Pretty cool, huh?"

Sue paused. The gift touched something deep within her—not just the cultural sophistication of the choice, but the meaning behind it. "Bob, that's... very thoughtful," she managed, the warmth in her voice fading as realization dawned.

Fred had gone utterly still. The colors in his suit had drained to a sickly pale green. "What did you just say?" His question had almost gone unheard, his aura however, was deafening.

Bob leaned in, stars practically shining in his pupils. "You have to admit your story is amazing—but just imagine it on stage!"

The interior temperature had dropped several degrees as Fred's expression transformed from shock to rage. "So, you think dragging us to a dramatized version of the worst year of our lives is a *good idea*?!"

The cabin plunged into auditory darkness. The hologram flickered and then shut down completely, as if even its programming recognized the need to retreat. George sank behind in his seat, shielding himself from the imminent explosion.

The reality of Bob's mistake came crashing down. "I thought it would honor what you went through," he squeaked. "Help process it in some cathartic way?"

"You got some nerve deciding what helps for all of us," Fred whispered poisonously. "You were only there when it ended. You have no idea what it was like!"

Bob flinched at the verbal blow, feeling internal bruises forming. George, who seemed to swallow his entire throat, finally emerged from his seat. His pink skin had paled, but there was resolution in his expression when he raised one of his hands.

"Fred," he began slowly. "Those days were hard for all of us." The memories of his own loneliness painted his words. "But I think... I think we should go. For closure."

Fred stared at his brother, stunned by the unexpected maturity. He opened his mouth for what would surely have been a scathing rebuttal when the shuttle door finally hissed open.

"Apologies for the delay," mumbled a bleary-eyed staff member, stifling a yawn. "Hope you enjoyed your—"

Fred was out of his seat and through the door before the attendant could finish, nearly bowling the poor creature over in his haste to escape. At the bottom of the ramp, he turned back to face the others scrambling to follow.

"Next time you want to surprise us—don't," he growled before stalking away.

George levitated quickly to Fred's side, blocking his path. "So does that mean we're going?" Hope bled through his question.

Fred glared at him, then at Bob and Sue approaching more cautiously. His anger flickered, giving way to something else—perhaps recognition that his reaction had been excessive, or simply resignation to the inevitable.

"Yeah, sure—whatever!" he shouted.

George's arms shot skyward. "AWESOME! This is gonna be so great!" He spun toward Bob. "Group photo time!"

Bob obliged with a reluctant smile, readying his camera. Fred grumbled something unintelligible but allowed himself to be pulled into frame with the others.

The camera flashed, capturing the moment in all its awkward glory: Fred contemplating the sweet release of a black hole, Sue's eyes half-rolling skyward, Bob peering from the corner with his peace sign, and George beaming as he held bunny-ear fingers behind everyone's head.

George snatched the camera, examining the result with delighted laughter. "Best commemorative picture ever!" he declared, holding it up for all to see.

"Come on," Fred exhaled, already turning away. "If we're doing this stupid opera thing, let's get it over with."

As they left the shuttle port, George continued admiring the photo, planning where to display it in their ship. Sue slipped her hand into Bob's. Fred walked slightly ahead, looking back only once—the knot in his chest tightening when he saw them together, feeling like an outsider in his own team.

Outside the opulent opera house, advertisements for "The Red Planet Tragedy" floated above the entrance, depicting stylized versions of the siblings in dramatic poses. Fred froze at the sight, and though Sue tensed beside him, she gave him a gentle nudge forward.

Inside, the gilded stage stood prepared with elaborate props and intricate set designs, audience members arriving in their finest attire. The high ceilings amplified every sound with its crystal chandeliers hanging like frozen tears above them. How fitting.

The plush velvet seats did little to cushion the weight between Fred and Sue. As they watched the actors who looked nothing like them perform, Sue's stomach churned at the romanticized interpretation of her isolation. Her head lowered in the darkness despite assuring to Bob that everything was fine.

"Quite the performance, isn't it?" Fred dug, his tone embossed with impertinence. "Though I'd say they're downplaying your eagerness to abandon us."

Sue squinted fiercely. "That's rich, coming from the one who couldn't wait to paint George as a horrible monster, scaring anyone away from him."

From behind them came the sound of George's enthusiastic munching. "Someone say my name?"

"No," they answered in unison, and George happily retreated into his popcorn.

In the quiet, Fred recalled the weeks believing Sue was dead before she found him and revealed her discovery of the lush Underground World. A world she refused to leave if it meant facing George without his memory.

Fred leaned closer to his sister, cupping his mouth with a paw. "He was dangerous then, but at least I stood by him when it mattered," he whispered venom. "But I suppose that concept is foreign to you now, wrapped up in your romance with the good captain."

"At least Bob understands the concept of trust," she muttered back sharp enough to draw blood.

"What's that?" Bob perked up beside her.

"Nothing, honey," she blurted, taking her boyfriend's hand and giving it a reassuring squeeze. Bob returned the sentiment with a soft kiss on her wrist.

Fred audibly gagged at the unapologetic display. Sue pressed her lips together, refusing to acknowledge his childishness.

Then came the scene of the couple's first meeting. The look they shared made Fred's blood boil. He couldn't understand how she could glamorize any part of that hellish time. How she could sit there, smiling at her *savior*, while actors trivialized their trauma for entertainment.

When the actors portrayed the siblings' dramatic reunion, Sue felt a hollow ache for what they'd lost. Years of resentment had frayed their connection, leaving them strangers wearing the masks of family. The final curtain fell to thunderous applause that the songstress barely registered, lost in her own emotional undertow.

She glanced to seat beside her, noticing it now empty. Her gaze snapped to the stage where Bob stood with a determined glint in his mellow brown eyes.

"Ladies, gentlemen, and beings of all designations," Bob's voice carried through the theater, "I'd like to thank the mayor for this opportunity. I hope you'll indulge me just a moment longer. I have a special announcement."

He blinked at her, his smile as disarmingly sincere as the day they'd met. "Sue, my starlight, my cosmic wonder, my most important discovery..."

Sue's breathing hitched as Bob dropped to one knee, a glittering ring materializing in his hand. The stage lights cast it in an magical glow, and for a moment, the universe seemed to hold its breath.

"Sue, my love," Bob trembled with zeal, "from the moment I found you on that desolate red planet, I knew my life would never be the same. Will you make me the happiest captain in the galaxy and marry me?"

The audience fell silent, a sea of anticipation splashing all around them.

"Oh, Bob," Sue quivered. "Of course I will."

She rose from her seat and their fingers interlaced. He guided her onto the stage, and when their lips met, the crowd erupted again. Beings of all species cheered in their native tongues, the universal language of joy needing no translation. For a blissful spell, the night's earlier troubles dissolved. Sue was weightless in Bob's arms, buoyed by his love and the crowd's approval.

No sooner than that did the moment shatter like a meteor through glass.

"No!" came a furious roar in the audience.

Sue's eyes snapped open to see Fred, his face burning with volcanic rage that brought her back to a horrifying reality. His stubby antlers lowered defensively as he climbed up the stage, and the celebratory audience dimmed into a shocked hush.

"You will not take her from us," he snarled at Bob through clenched teeth. "I forbid this union!"

The crowd gasped. Sue constricted at the feeling of Bob's arm tightening protectively around her waist. She faced her brother, visibly begging him. "Don't do this."

Fred ignored her, his hot gaze still honed on Bob. "If you truly care for her, you'll leave. Now. And never return." His voice became as frigid as the void between stars. "Or I swear, I will make you regret the day you ever set foot on that red planet."

The weight of the ultimatum pressed down, heavy and suffocating. Sue watched the audience's reactions curdle into discomfort. She looked from Fred to Bob, her heart painfully torn.

Under the harsh stage lights, the songstress realized the real drama was only just beginning. Her lavender eyes, moments ago shimmering with joy, now brimmed with sorrow. She turned away from her brother, pressing her face against Bob as if his embrace could shield her from the choice before her.

"Enough," Sue whispered. Then, louder: "Enough!" Her hair whipped around her face as she confronted her so-called protector—her tormentor. "For years, I've tried to be the peacekeeper, the bridge between us all..."

Sue's hands trembled with newfound determination as she removed her insignia ring. Its intricate symbols caught the light as she let it fall. The metallic clink against the floor echoed through the stunned auditorium. She stood tall, head detached. A strange empowerment washing over her with Fred shrunk underneath.

"I'm done. I want to help the galaxy, but I can't do this anymore. I'll still be out there, doing what I can—but not like this." She paused. "Not with you."

Another collective gasp tore through the crowd, followed by a current of whispers. Their disappointment falling onto the songstress without mercy. But she squared her shoulders, standing her ground before everyone.

"But," Fred stammered, colors flaring nonsensically. "You can't—"

Sue had already stormed off, her hand finding Bob's. "Yes, I can," she barked without looking back. "Goodbye, brother."

From the audience, George rose weightlessly from his seat. "Sue, wait!" His voice cracked as tears streamed down his face.

Sue barely acknowledged him before hurrying out the building, her new fiancé at her side failing to subdue her. In the parking lot, Fred's footsteps pounded behind them and she quickened her pace toward Bob's ship; a silver promise of escape in the distance.

"Stop!" Fred shouted breathlessly. "Think about what you're doing!"

Bob's hand tightened around hers in a silent plea—but Sue kept her gaze fixed on the ship's ramp. The explorer glanced back, locking onto Fred with an apologetic grimace. An avalanche of pity came flooding into the alien's senses, the unwanted sympathy from his sister's human partner made him queasy with humiliation.

Once aboard, Sue sealed the hatch behind them, severing the connection to the world outside with devastating finality. Fred stood frozen before it, watching numbly as the ship hummed to life.

He clutched Sue's discarded ring, still warm from her touch. The insignia kissed the moonlight, casting prismatic reflections against his blackening vision. The familiar symbols that once represented their unity now seemed to scrutinize him.

He tilted his head skyward where Bob's ship had vanished moments before. His special sense, his greatest strength, now truly solidified itself as a curse. The residual feelings of hurt, anger, and disappointment from his older sister polluted the air around him, unrelenting.

Chapter 4: The Antidote

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"No, come back! Don't leave us!" George pleaded, his cry filling the parking lot, but it was too late. The cruise ship had already disappeared into the inky void.

He let his arms drop limp to his sides in dejection and glanced at Fred, who continued to gaze at the stars. The gentle giant hovered over and placed a comforting hand on his brother's shoulder, gingerly coaxing his attention.

"Fred...?"

"LEAVE ME ALONE!" Fred growled, his teeth bared threateningly. He pushed George with an unexpected strength, causing the larger alien to stagger backwards.

"Just go away, George! I can't... I can't deal with you right now."

George's expression crumpled, worry giving way to hurt. "But... we can't just let her go. I didn't even get to say goodbye..."

Fred's heart shattered at the quiver in his brother's voice. He wanted to retract his biting words and accept the comfort offered by him. But he recoiled at the mere thought, feeling unworthy of such a luxury.

"Please," Fred whispered, his voice breaking. "Just go."

"Fred, no..." George reached out again, but his eyes suddenly widened, body paralyzed.

Fred stood with his back turned, his special sense projected a chilling aura. An ability he usually held in check now deliberately stretched outwards to manipulate his brother's emotions, wrapping him in an icy grip. Fred maintained the stillness of a living statue, while his brother's instincts screamed at him to retreat.

Eventually, George released a heavy, defeated sigh and turned away, drifting slowly back toward the ship. As he lifted off, Fred was torn apart by contradicting impulses: relief that George was leaving, regret that he'd pushed him away, anger at everything that had happened, and a desperate longing to call him back.

Pride kept his mouth shut. Perhaps it was better if he never spoke again. He watched the ship shrink against the darkening sky until it was nothing more than a pinprick of light among the stars. Only then did he turn away, his stubby antlers drooping as the weight of solitude settled over him.

He wandered aimlessly into the darker reaches of the floating metropolis. The deeper he ventured, the more the city deteriorated. Vibrant paint peeled away from surfaces, street lights flickering erratically with little illumination. The constant hum of ships overhead faded

to eerie silence, broken only by occasional skittering sounds from unseen creatures in the shadows.

His special sense picked up waves of fear and desperation that permeated this forgotten corner of the city. Flashes of muted blues and sickly greens rippled across his torso in response.

He turned down a particularly shabby street, movement catching his eye. A slimy creature peered at him from the insides of a dumpster, its eyes glowing with ominous interest. He quickened his pace, his heart beat audible.

"Get it together, Fred," he slapped at his forehead. "You're a Galactic Superhero, for crying out loud. You've faced down the Big Fish Boss. This is nothing."

But the humility of guilt and regret pressured him with each cautious step. Memories on the Red Planet rushed through his mind; George, injured and confused, his memory wiped clean. Fred had been so angry then, so bitter at the unfairness of it all. And now here he was, making the same mistakes again.

A strained sob escaped him as he leaned against a grimy wall, the cool brick soothing against his burning skin.

"I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry."

Catching a glint in his watery eyes, Fred's attention was drawn to a flickering neon sign, projecting an unsettling red light onto the wet pavement. Its message, "The Cosmic Canteen," was written in a jagged, otherworldly script that seemed to transform into different languages when viewed from varying angles.

He instinctively hesitated to enter such an establishment. Though despite its rather seedy appearance, he could sense a surprisingly positive aura emanating from the inside, drawing him closer.

He wiped away his tears and took a deep breath. "Please, don't let this be another mistake."

With shaky paws, he slowly opened the door. A rush of unfamiliar sounds and smells hit him like a physical force, stunning him for a moment. A cacophony of strange voices, ranging from high-pitched chirps to low, rumbling growls, inflamed his senses as he soaked up the rambunctious atmosphere.

Fred eased his way through the crowd, his stout frame bumping against tentacles, scales, and fur. Space shanties and loud howling from the patrons punctuated the din. He approached the bar, where a multi-armed bartender juggled an array of bottles and glasses.

"What'll it be?" the bartender asked, four eyes blinking unorderedly.

Fred's pupils shrunk as he looked over the menu. "Uh, something strong. And preferably non fatal to my species."

The bartender chuckled. "Coming right up."

Fred had only to wait seconds before the bartender slid a glass towards him, filled with a swirling liquid that seemed to glow from within. He perched his lips on the rim, only to be disorientated by his special sense. He inspected the liquid in his glass, spotting a tinge of blue and pink through the blur. Setting the drink down, the colors sharpened into a figure he'd recognize anywhere.

In the dimly lit corner across from him sat Old Fingerhead. The blue-skinned alien slouched in his seat, tentacles drooping listlessly over the back of his head with a miniature cityscape of empty glasses surrounding him.

"Old Fingerhead?"

Fingerhead's languid eyes met Fred's, a spark of recognition flashing beneath the haze of alcohol.

"Well, if it isn't the galaxy's favorite emotional sponge," he drawled, words slurring slightly. "Come to arrest me for public intoxication?"

A bead of sweat trickled down Fred's forehead as irritation manifested in an obnoxious neon orange across his suit. The color betrayed him, leaving him feeling exposed and vulnerable.

"I'm off-duty, actually," he replied with a gulp. "Just taking a little break."

Fingerhead let out a dry, haunting laugh that seemed to linger in the air. "That's a good one," he taunted. "I'm sure it was a hard day's work of—*what is it that you do again?* Force others to abide by your flawed justice system?"

Fred grimaced at his own reflection in his drink. "Don't be silly. We're peacekeepers," he spoke in a forced monotone. "At least, that's what we're supposed to be."

The blue alien's laughter slowly died down, the utter disdain on his features becoming more and more apparent. Fred shifted uncomfortably, picking up on a dizzying cluster of emotions that concealed something quite profound and utterly indecipherable. It was unsettling, like trying to read a book written in constantly shifting ink.

"How's George?" Fingerhead inquired, his frown holding the illusion of a smirk.

Fred cleared his throat before responding. "He's doing alright... why do you care?"

"I don't," Fingerhead answered flatly. "I just heard that he got his arms back, is all. *How nice.*" He took a slow sip from his newly arrived glass of god-knows-what, lidded eyes never leaving Fred's.

"Yeah, he did. He's fine—everything is fine." Fred brought his glass closer as if trying to hide behind it.

"Mmm," Fingerhead droned, each syllable dripping with condescension. "Doesn't seem very fine."

"Well, it's none of your business!" Fred snapped, slamming his drink on the table.

The bar fell silent for a moment. When Fingerhead's gaze dropped, Fred followed it to the beverage still clutched in his hands.

"What?"

"You gonna drink that or just admire it all night?"

"I intend to," Fred muttered, avoiding his stare as he traced circles on the wooden bar top with the glass.

Just then, he felt a sudden weight on his shoulder, realizing that Fingerhead had strolled over and planted himself on the adjacent stool next to him. The alien leaned in, gesturing at the cocktail with a playful glint in his eyes.

"Do you even know what you ordered?" he whispered in a husky voice far too close for comfort.

Fred instinctively leaned away. "Of course I do!" he squeaked, before realizing how ridiculous it was to lie.

Fingerhead let out a sardonic snort. "If you say so, short stack."

"Don't call me that..." Fred grumbled, the nickname striking a nerve.

"Fine, then what do you prefer? Tiny? Sir littlest?" A smug grin spread across Fingerhead's face, an arsenal of belittling names clearly at the ready. Fred's stony expression refused to humor him, however.

"You know," Fingerhead began, raising a hand to shield his eyes from Fred's suit. "You really should put a seizure warning on that thing."

Fred glanced down at his vibrant attire and chuckled softly. "I suppose my fashion sense is not as sharp as my emotional intuition."

Fingerhead laughed again, but this time it was more subdued, and genuine sounding. The two sat there together without words for a while, simply listening to the background noise of the bar: glassware dinging, murmured conversations, the occasional burst of laughter from a distant table.

Fred's thoughts ping-ponged in the quiet between them. On one hand, he was tempted to leave, but the other had beckoned him to stay and solve the mystery that was the fisherman himself. While he had always been a nuisance to the Galactic Superheroes, tonight there was something distinctly off about him.

"So," Fred ventured, stretching a palm on the counter, "how about some drinks on me? What's your poison?"

Fingerhead's eyes narrowed, searching the hero's face for any hint of mockery or ulterior motives. Finding none, he sighed a sound like wind whistling through ancient pipes.

"Life, my vertically challenged friend," he slumped. "Life is the poison, and we're all just looking for the antidote."

Fred raised his drink, the liquid catching the overhead lights. "To finding the antidote, then?"

A ghost of a smile tugged at Fingerhead's lips. "Now you're speaking my language, hero."

Their glasses met in a gentle clink, a truce that any bad feelings would be set aside at least for now.

"Speaking of language, let's see if you can handle the local dialect." Fingerhead nodded towards the concoction that pulsed like radioactive waste. "Go on, take a sip. Unless you're afraid it might short-circuit those fancy lights of yours."

Fred's antlers twitched at the challenge. He glared at Fingerhead, then at the mysterious substance. The smell alone made his eyes water, a pungent scent of overripe extraterrestrial fruit.

"I've faced down intergalactic warlords. I can handle a drink."

With a quick motion, he tipped the glass back and the effect was instantaneous. Fire erupted in his throat, spreading through his chest like molten lava. His eyes bulged, and a violent cough wracked his body. Colors exploded across his suit into a collage of chaos.

"Oh, priceless!" Fingerhead's gravelly chortle cut through the sensory overload. "You should see your face, shortness. That was so worth the wait!"

"What... what in the cosmos was that?" Fred gasped, trying to catch his breath with the alcohol still burning his insides.

"That, my friend, is what the locals call 'Supernova Surprise,'" Fingerhead's tentacles waved with glee. "Though I'd personally recommend the Moonrockshine instead."

The initial burn subsided, and Fred felt a warmth spreading through his body, dulling his sharp edges. He studied his drinking companion, his chin resting above his knuckle.

"You know what," Fred smacked his lips, lacking bite. "I believe another round could be in order."

"Well, well. Maybe there's hope for you yet, short stack." Fingerhead signaled the bartender, his movements more animated than before. "Another round of Supernovas, my good man, and make it a double!"

Drink after drink, Fred found himself relaxing in Fingerhead's presence, the earlier aggression between them dissipating. The fisherman launched into a rant about a particularly stubborn Hoo Hoo infestation, his hands gesticulating wildly and nearly knocking over their glasses.

Fred couldn't stop a hiccuping giggle from escaping, the sound startling him. He couldn't remember the last time he'd genuinely laughed like this. The colors rippling across his suit

shifted to warmer hues, reflecting his improving mood.

"Wow," Fred breathed, engrossed in Fingerhead's accounts. "I always wondered why you hated them so much, but after hearing that, I completely understand."

Fingerhead leaned in, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial drone. "Never trust a Hoo Hoo."

As the night progressed, their glasses emptied and refilled, Fred shared stories of his own. Tales of narrow escapes, George's antics and Sue's exasperation. With each anecdote, the wall between hero and villain crumbled a little more.

Chapter End Notes

AHA, YES. THIS WHOLE TIME IT'S BEEN LEADING UP TO A FRED AND FINGERHEAD TEAM UP FIC.

but yeah, everything after this has been my favorite to write so far because the fun dynamic I have forged for these two.

oh and fyi, Fred doesn't know that it was Fingerhead who returned George's arms cus Bob took all the dang credit!

Chapter 5: Stage Fright

The vibrant pulse of a tropical beat coursed through The Cosmic Canteen, coating the air in a catchy soundscape. Fred stiffened, his eyes glimmering shades of burnt amber. The bar around them brimmed with excitement as Fred's fingers twitched an erratic pattern against his glass.

Amidst the flamboyant music, pink neon lights sputtered to life above the bar, announcing "Intergalactic Karaoke Night" in a garish array of multilingual advertisements.

Next to Fred sat Old Fingerhead, who casually tapped at the bar's surface in sync with the hero's nervous drumming. A playful smile spread across his aquamarine face and Fred's suit blinked a palette of panic.

"Oh no."

"Oh yes," Fingerhead's grin intensified as he purred. "It's showtime, Freddie boy."

Before Fred could protest further, Fingerhead's clasped his arm with impressive fortitude. He hauled him towards the small stage, forcing a microphone into his hand.

On stage, a holographic screen flickered to life, revealing a saccharine-sweet ballad from the Andromeda system; all swirling pastel colors and lyrics about universal harmony that looked like they'd been written by a committee of overly optimistic preschoolers.

Fred's face flushed, his suit cycling through a rainbow of embarrassed hues. "I can't sing this," he hissed.

"Oh please, as if singing cheesy propaganda isn't a specialty of the Galactic Friends."

With that, the holographic screen highlighted the start of the song and Fingerhead wasted no time singing out the lyrics with gusto. His voice was raw, though unexpectedly pleasant. Like a jagged blade, carving out a rough but charming melody that rendered the hero momentarily speechless.

Fred felt something inside him crack; a fissure forming in his emotional armor. A tiny spark of borrowed courage mixed with the synthetic cocktails, dissolving the last crumbs of resistance.

Clutching the mic tightly, his breath escaped him in a heavy sigh before a new sound emerged. Finally, free from all constraints.

The two aliens' voices blended together in a surprisingly harmonious duet. Despite their clumsy execution, the performance lit up the night as the unlikely pair stumbled through butchered lyrics, their rivalry momentarily forgotten in the shared spotlight.

The crowd went wild with raucous, full-throated celebration. Raised cigarette lighters and naturally glowing body parts waved in the audience. Cat-calls and wolf-whistles—some literally from wolf-like creatures, filled the smoky air.

As they reached the final, drawn-out note, Fred's special sense kicked into full gear; a tsunami of shared joy that drowned out every worry and past trauma. It was a perfect recipe for a light show to erupt from him, making the room pulsate with a glamorous spectra. He could feel from the audience, amazement tinged with bewilderment and that peculiar confusion that comes when witnessing something beyond understanding.

Fred was hit with a sudden wave of nostalgia. A soft pink haze clouded his vision and the smell of sulfuric vapor mingled with the taste of full-body numbness. It all transported him back to his days on the Red Planet, where his worries and responsibilities could melt away in the euphoric embrace of those misty hot springs. A brief, seductive window where his special sense could ignore the universe's cries for help.

Their performance concluded with a mix of flirty whistles and good-natured boos. As the duo wobbled down the steps, Fred's suit continued its chromatic dance, happily riding the residual wave of collective euphoria.

Fingerhead slapped Fred on the back, nearly sending the shorter alien face-first into the sticky floor. "Not bad for a goody-two-shoes!"

Fred rubbed the back of his neck bashfully, replaying everything in his mind as they waltzed through the crowd. Tonight could last forever, as far as he was concerned.

They had barely reached their barstools when a massive shadow fell over them. Fred turned to find himself staring at a wall of green, scaly muscle. His eyes traveled upward to meet not one, but three pairs of furious eyes glaring down at him.

Fred's special sense immediately picked up on the hostile intent from the creature. His torso dulled to a defensive muddy brown as he stumbled a step backward.

"Yes...?" Fred squinted a twitching eye.

"See her?" The green alien jabbed a clawed finger toward a slender, azure-skinned beauty lounging at a nearby table. "I saw you eye-balling her. That's *my* girl."

Fred glanced over. The azure female batted thick eyelashes and blew him a kiss, her plump lips curling mischievously.

"Oh," Fred gulped, his suit exposing a dash of flattered pink. He offered an awkward little wave before he could stop himself.

The three-headed alien's nostrils flared in unison. "Hey!" they bellowed, thrusting a massive finger into Fred's chest. "Listen up, light show. You stay away, or I'll rip you into glowing confetti. Got it?"

"Oh, he's got it," Fingerhead interrupted, stepping between them. He swayed with the unmistakable rhythm of profound intoxication, his expression alight with toxic testosterone. "Your girl's number, that is."

Fred's knees weakened as the two aliens stared each other down. The hostility he sensed between them made his head spin far worse than any drink could.

"So, you two think you're hot stuff, huh?" the central head spat. "My great-grandmother could sing better, and she's been dead for centuries!"

"Gran-gran must be quite the talent," Fingerhead drawled. "Care to demonstrate?"

The three-headed alien rose to full height, asserting a primal dominance over them. But Fingerhead stood his ground, unsteady but determined under the darkness of the creature's massive chins. His grin was deadly, a weapon in itself.

Fred's diplomatic training kicked in, hands raising in a placating gesture. "Gentlemen, please. Perhaps if we—"

"Shut it, squishy," the left head spat without breaking eye contact.

"Squishy?" Fingerhead's brows furrowed, tentacles bristling. "Now listen here, *triple threat*. Fred may look soft, doughy, stubby, compressible... semisolid..."

"Are you going to say something nice eventually?" Fred interjected flatly.

"Quiet, Freddie," Fingerhead chirped, patting him on the head like some disposable pet. "The grown-ups are talking."

He turned back to the three-headed alien. "Point is, my gelatinous friend here might look like a de-shelled armadillo, but he's got... *something*. And I'd be scared of that something if I were you."

"I'm not intimidated by your tiny boyfriend, you pathetic punk!"

"Then maybe, you should be afraid of me instead?" Fingerhead responded in a daring growl as he brought himself face-to-face with the danger.

As the conflict escalated before him, Fred felt the boundaries of uncharted territory. He couldn't recall ever being caught in the middle of a dispute without being the instigator himself.

In an instant, pandemonium broke loose into a drunken explosion of violence.

Tables splintered. Glasses shattered against the walls, leaving sticky residue. Fred found himself spinning, ducking, weaving through the destruction while Fingerhead's wild, flailing limbs sent bar-goers flying over him.

"Didn't we just sing a song about love and unity?!" Fred hollered in a hysterical pitch. "Was the message lost in translation or something?!" He threw himself behind Fingerhead, a karate

stance at the ready.

"UNITY!?" Fingerhead screamed back with glee, dodging a chair. "THIS IS UNITY, FRED!"

The brawl raged on and a deranged laugh erupted from the fisherman's throat. A sound so manic and unhinged it stopped the entire bar's brawl mid-punch. It was a laugh that didn't just pierce the air; it shredded it, contorting from humor into something bordering on cosmic horror.

Fred's lips twitched, torn between a chuckle and a shudder as he witnessed the once cautious and irritable alien transform into a creature consumed by sheer madness.

He allowed himself to stare in a moment of morbid fascination before the bartender's furious voice brought back reality with a crash.

"Alright, you two! Out! Now!"

Fred blinked, suddenly hyper aware of the overturned tables, the shattered glasses, and the disgruntled patrons. Fingerhead's arm lazily slung around his shoulders, swinging him from side to side.

"Party poopers," Fingerhead mumbled as they were unceremoniously shoved out onto the street.

Chapter 6: These Little Tablets

The crisp night air hit Fred like a comet, sending icy sobriety splashing across his warm face. The clarity lasted only seconds before the fog of his indulgences rolled back in.

Outside the Cosmic Canteen, the full weight of his intoxication became apparent. Gravity pulled and swayed beneath his feet, each step a negotiation with the universe.

He glanced at Fingerhead—decked out in those ludicrous pink overalls with tentacles curled in an angry pout—and erupted into laughter. He had let out a full-bodied, unrestrained explosion of mirth that seemed to bubble up from some previously unexplored region of his being. It was the kind of giggle fit that acknowledged the sheer farce of life itself.

"What's so funny, pint-size?" Fingerhead snarled, yet there was a trail of laughter in his own words, influenced by the hero's squealing, unfiltered joy.

Fred shook his head, failing to regain composure. "Just... this. Us. Who would've thought?"

Fingerhead's restrained smile threatened to show itself, the contagious guffaw a worthy foe to his gruff exterior. He surrendered a chuckle; a sound that was part laugh, part growl.

"Yeah, well, don't get used to it, kid. You're more trouble than all the local riffraff combined," he rasped, eyelids lowering. "You're a bad influence, you know that?"

Fred's laughter faded into a contented sigh. "I... I should prob'ly call it a night." He blinked in a futile attempt to clear his tunnel vision, but the world continued to swim around him.

"Bah! What's the rush? The night's still young—look at it!" Fingerhead's arms gestured wildly at some invisible grand spectacle where there was only empty space.

"Ah, gee," Fred muttered, fishing his communicator from under his sleeve. "I... I dunno—I think I should call George. He's like, stupid or something," he trailed off, unable to give an excuse as he scrolled through his contacts.

The communicator suddenly weighed heavy on his wrist. His fingers hovered over George's name, but uncertainty was evident in every tremble. Calling George meant admitting weakness, exposing his current state of disarray.

Fingerhead watched the hero's inner struggle, conflicted himself. Part of him leaned towards offering comfort, while another screamed at the very thought. His smile twisted into a grimace as these contradictory impulses intertwined.

"Okay, look," he began, leaning against a wall, a scratchy sigh releasing, "why don't you just come aboard my ship for a bit? I uh... have an incredible view of the city... not to mention hangover remedies that could raise the dead." He winced at his own words, unsure if he was willing to invite someone into his personal space.

A spark of temptation ignited as Fred considered the offer dangling before him. It was like easy prey, frozen in place, caught in the sights of a skilled and hungry hunter waiting to take its prize.

"I shouldn't," Fred whispered, though his body betrayed him as he stepped closer to Fingerhead like a homeless child.

"No pressure, shorty." Fingerhead pushed himself off the grimy wall and crossed his arms. "But I think we both know you don't want to go back and deal with *familial* drama right now. I don't need a special sense to see that."

Fred's vision spun as he retreated into his mind. Responsibility cracked with relief, the battle for pure, unadulterated desire to escape put him at a standstill. His suit pulsed with colored friction: anxious red, tempted green, uncertain blue.

"Okay," he breathed, a decision falling into surrender.

With a simple tap on a portable touch-screen, Fingerhead's ship materialized with a flourish; a sleek vessel that looked like it had been designed by a maritime enthusiast with a severe addiction to luxury.

"Welcome," Fingerhead announced with theatrical grandeur, "to my humble transportation."

Adjusting the collar of his suit, Fred marched officially toward the fishing vessel, though his legs seemed to have a mind of their own; zigzagging across the ramp. Fingerhead ran up to him and kept a steadying hand on his back, all while muttering curses about "babysitting duties".

The interior was a bizarre mashup of high-tech elegance and fishing expedition aesthetic. Fishing nets adorned the ceiling, while advanced navigation systems hummed beneath mounted fishing rods.

Once aboard the ship, Fred lunged himself onto a plush couch. He stretched out his limbs, the light bathing him in a low, bluish hue. Relaxing his back on the soft fabric, he examined his surroundings.

"Nice... ship," he managed, glancing around every conversation piece.

"Yeah, just don't get any ideas of sneaking in and secretly living here or anything," the fisherman responded dryly, plopping himself at the ship's controls.

Fingerhead set course for the skies, cutting a smooth arc through the night. As he glided the fishing vessel over the city's neon-drenched skyline, the atmosphere grew contemplative. Fred's earlier karaoke-induced elation had dissolved, leaving a somber undertow when he gazed down at the recovering sectors from the space pirate's destruction, reminding him of everything he was trying to avoid before.

Fingerhead noticed, his tentacles curling with a hint of consternation. "You're brooding," he stated, more observation than question.

"I'm not brooding. I'm... processing."

With a snarky huff, Fingerhead scurried off into the kitchen area, where Fred could hear the curious clattering of dishes and the rummaging of cabinets.

"What are you doing?" Fred squinted at the fisherman who disappeared into the refrigeration unit.

"Finding something," came his distracted response. A dismissive wave brushing him off from the fridge. "Still thirsty?"

"Actually, I think I've had enough." Fred swooned, resting his red face against the frosty window.

"Well, perhaps you'd be more interested in something else... to pass the time?" Fingerhead's words were heavily muffled, he used the back of his foot to close the fridge, drinks and snacks cluttering his mouth and arms.

The hero turned and tilted his head. "Such as?"

Fingerhead smirked cheekily as he set down the assortment of snacks and drinks on a nearby table. With zest, he produced a small, iridescent tablet from a hidden pocket in his overalls.

"How about a little mood adjustment?" he beamed.

"What is that...?"

"An alternative to time travel," he announced, waggling the tablet like a magician revealing a trick and putting on his best salesman voice. "Not your standard transport, mind you. This little beauty can take you places conventional ships can't even imagine."

The peacekeeper recoiled in his seat. "A controlled substance?! You realize I could arrest you for this, right?"

Fingerhead's dull blue eyes narrowed to impossible levels. He pinched the bridge of his nose, letting out an extended sigh. "Oh, you are such a goodie-two-shoes," he groaned. "But if you insist, I got extra handcuffs in the back—you know, because you're *so* into that sorta thing."

The tablet gleamed in the fisherman's hands, a siren's promise of escape. Fred's suit began a fascinating clash of color: hesitation bleeding into curiosity, fear mixing with wild intrigue.

"Well? Care to take your mind someplace else?"

"I have ethical considerations," Fred croaked, keeping a professional distance.

"Uh-huh," Fingerhead nasally drawled. "Listen, kid, if you don't want to—"

In one swift motion, Fred snatched the tablet and swallowed it before his better judgment could intervene. "I hate you," he declared breathily, carrying more passivity than malice.

Fingerhead's eyelids shot up, he stared down at his empty palm, then back to Fred. His opened mouth slowly settled into a tight smirk as he watched the hero slump his head back onto the cushions. The fisherman chuckled, grabbing a snack and settling into a nearby chair, watching his guest with the keen anticipation of a scientist observing a volatile experiment.

For a while, nothing of note happened. Fingerhead began to wonder if maybe he had simply drifted off to sleep. Annoyed but slightly relieved, he stood up, ready to call it a night.

Without warning, Fred's entire body lit the room ablaze like a flash bomb, his horrifying scream piercing the room with light staining every conceivable surface. His eyes shot open, spinning colors so rapidly they blended into a nauseating white, his body twitching and convulsing with an energy that felt simultaneously destructive and transformative.

"F-Fingerhead??" he shouted, legs trembling, but the other alien was nowhere to be seen.

He parted his lips to speak again, but instead, a plume of oozing colors exploded from his mouth in a supernova of brilliant fractals, coalescing into a perfect replica of the hero. This luminous clone smiled; an impossible version of himself, before floating away into the heavens, leaving behind a trail of prismatic light.

Suddenly, he wasn't Fred anymore. He was a living, breathing mood ring with every heartbeat, every whisper, every trembling emotion across the infinite galaxy reflecting off him.

Memories cascaded upon him like shooting stars. A mother's love as she cradled her newborn. The crushing grief of a lone asteroid miner who'd lost his entire crew. Jubilant celebrations on a thousand different worlds. Quiet moments of desperate loneliness. Passion. Fear. Hope.

His body became a prism that leaked pigmentation from every pore, each hue a translation of collective emotional language. His eyes became kaleidoscopes, spinning with the accumulated consciousness of billions.

Fred gasped, though no sound broke free. The vortex of memories intensified. Possible futures bloomed and collapsed like a star's life cycle. Each potential timeline a delicate, translucent possibility. He saw war. Peace. Destruction. Rebirth. All breathing with the same pair of lungs.

Then the vision sharpened. George. Sue.

His siblings emerged from the swirling emotional tundra. But they were not alone. Bob stood beside Sue, their hands intertwined, surrounded by children. A family. Their family—faded into a constellational portrait, with Fred nowhere to be seen.

Insignificance became a physical force, pressing against his chest, crushing him. He was watching a future where he didn't exist; where his protective love had become irrelevant. Abandoned. Forgotten.

The spiritual landslip began to recede, its chaotic swell slowly calming. Fred's body trembled, muscles twitching with residual psychic energy. A dark silhouette wavered at the edge of his perception.

"Wow, I almost feel bad about this," a gravelly voice cut through the remaining visceral fog.

"Is he going to be okay?" another voice, with a strange and deep reverb echoed in the ship.

Fred tried to respond, but it was only a whimper. The red stripes on his suit flickered like dying navigation lights. The ship's interior seemed to breathe with him, expanding and contracting in sync with his ragged breaths. Tides of an invisible ocean tilted his world upside down, with his frail form collapsing with it.

"I'm here... I'm still here." Fred rambled on the cold floor, his voice a weak protest, demanding reality.

"Sure you are, kid," someone chuckled.

Fred's eyes grew heavy, the frigid landscape of his conscience slowly dissolving into darkness. Sleep consumed him, dragging him into a mercifully dreamless void.

Chapter 7: Mourning After

Chapter Summary

The broship continues.

Fred awoke to a pounding headache and a mouth that felt like it was filled with Red Planet sand. Groaning, he cracked open one eye, immediately regretting the decision as the harsh light of morning assaulted his blurry vision. The constant hum of his special sense was gone. It had been completely fried, leaving him with nothing but the throbbing pain behind his temples.

"Nngh, what in the...?" he muttered, struggling to piece together the night before. Each memory floated just beyond his grasp, fragments refusing to form a coherent narrative.

As consciousness reluctantly returned, Fred realized he wasn't in his own bed. The hanging fishing lures and the faint smell of star-salt focused into what he came to recognize as Old Fingerhead's ship. The lingering taste of cheap alien alcohol filled in another piece of the puzzle.

"Oh, stars..."

He scanned the room, gaze landing on Fingerhead hunched at his computer terminal. His fingers tapped lazily across the keyboard. At the rustle of sheets, he swiveled to meet his tired eyes on Fred's.

"Morning, sunshine," Fingerhead's voice sounded raspier than usual. "Sleep well?"

Fred awkwardly pushed himself upright as the fisherman sauntered over, extending a steaming cup of something that smelled suspiciously like engine coolant mixed with seaweed.

"I... uh..." Fred trailed, professional embarrassment heating his face. "What is that?"

"Morning Dew," Fingerhead replied, lingering on the name before taking a long, appreciative whiff. "Want some?"

The hero wrinkled his nose at the questionable liquid. "I'll pass, thanks."

"Suit yourself." Fingerhead shrugged, plopping back in his chair and spinning around to prop his feet on the dashboard in one fluid motion. "So," he began with a playful frown only he could pull off. "Come here often?"

"You're an idiot." Fred rubbed his dry eyes, trying to hide the upward twitch of his lip.

"That's not what you said last night," Fingerhead countered, his finger-like head appendages wiggling suggestively.

The smaller alien turned pale, failing to sense the sarcasm. "I... we didn't..."

Fingerhead's chuckle filled the small cabin. "Relax, shorty," he followed with a yawn. "I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot fishing pole."

Eased by relief, the tension visibly left Fred's shoulders in a shaky huff. "And you let me sleep in your bed?" he asked, holding up a silky sheet in question. "Where did you sleep?"

"I didn't." Fingerhead shrugged, taking a large gulp from his mug. "Though it wasn't completely my choice, with you *disco-balling* the whole damn night and all."

Fred groaned, burying his face in his hands. "I must have been... sensing in my sleep," he reasoned. "Whatever you gave me last night—my special sense—it feels completely used up."

"Yeah," Fingerhead breathed in and rubbed the back of his neck. "That was... not my brightest idea."

"It's not your fault," Fred whispered, fingers tracing the smooth texture of the bedding. "I should've known better than to do something so reckless."

The fisherman studied him. "It's not normal for you to just let go, is it?"

"I..." Fred lowered his head, voice fading. "No. I'm usually... scared. All the time." The admission seemed to deflate him.

"Of what?"

He took a shaky breath. "My family. After everything on that stupid Red Planet... I can't lose them again." He paused. "But I think I already have, after last night."

The ship's ambient hum grew louder in the silence. Fingerhead crossed his legs, overalls creaking against him. He remembered the news reports of the rescue, and the details of the tragedy that came to light. His own role in that event, however, never did.

"Family's complicated," he finally said, exhaling slowly. "Trust me, I know."

With that, Fingerhead pivoted away and much to Fred's astonishment, the fisherman's tentacles began to move independently, forming a distinct smile on the back of his head.

"Greetings!" it exclaimed cheerfully, voice robotic and slightly distorted as if it were emerging from a hidden speaker.

Fred's eyes widened at the unexpected third-party. He screamed and ducked behind a pillow. Fingerhead glanced over his shoulder, expression unmoved.

"Fred, meet Young Mouthbottom. Young Mouthbottom, Fred."

"It's very nice to meet you!" Despite the mechanical quality, Young Mouthbottom conveyed warmth and friendliness, much like Fred's own brother.

Fred peeked cautiously over the pillow. "Nice to... you too."

"Alright, that's enough," Fingerhead cut in, twisting around and concealing his tentacles—Mouthbottom's mouth—in a tight grip.

"Anyway..." he sighed, "you think you've got it all figured out. Then life throws you a curveball, and suddenly, you're not in control of your own actions—my feelings, not even completely my own. Anyone would go crazy with someone constantly breathing down their neck. Space and privacy are crucial to... one's happiness."

The hero stared at the ground, a thought sparking. "That's why it's so hard to read you—you're emotions... you're not just one person."

"Basically," Fingerhead spat. "So, my advice? Give 'em some space and they won't get so sick of ya."

"I just want to protect them," Fred swallowed. "But..."

"Maybe protection isn't always what they need. Sometimes, it's about being there when they want you to be. Listening. Trusting them to handle their own messes in their own time."

Fred blinked. "When did you get so insightful?"

"I've lived a long life, kid." The tentacles at Fingerhead's crown curled inward. "Picked up a few things along the way, including my brother who wasn't always here."

Fred sat speechless, noting the movements of Fingerhead's tentacles. A sign of vulnerability he'd never witnessed before. Somewhere within, Mouthbottom must be feeling some form of guilt, hearing his brother talk about him like some sort of parasite.

The blue-skinned alien reached for a nearby bottle with deliberate slowness. "Speaking of picking up things," he resumed with a snuffle, "I've collected a bad habit or two myself."

"What do you mean?" Fred eyed the bottle with growing unease.

Fingerhead brought the bottle to his lips, taking a long swig before shaking his head. "This stuff," he motioned at the label with a tap. "It's not just for fun anymore. It's... a problem."

Though his special sense remained frustratingly absent, Fred felt empathy surge through him, freezing him in place.

"Fingerhead, I—"

"Don't need your pity," Fingerhead snapped, bite returning. "Besides, it keeps him quiet." He leaned back, eyelids sliding closed. "Just thought you should know. Given... everything."

Fred pushed himself off the bed and approached what he previously thought was his life-long nemesis, reaching out with an unsure paw. "Thank you for telling me," he said. "I'm—"

"ATTENTION. THIS IS AN EMERGENCY." A mechanized voice boomed through the vessel. "URGENT ASSISTANCE REQUIRED IN THE NEBULA X SECTOR. THREAT LEVEL: CRITICAL."

The emergency broadcast exploded from the ship's radio. Fred doubled over, the migraine intensifying. His suit flickered pathetically, strobing between muted grays and sharp reds as he yelped in pain. He pressed a palm against his temple, clutching the nearby chair for support.

Fingerhead's expression hardened. "Duty calls, eh?"

"My head... it's unbearable!" Fred's knees nearly buckled. "Turn that thing off!"

The fisherman rolled his eyes but complied, showing little sympathy. "I offered you a cure. Should've taken it."

"That gross stuff?"

"Mhmm," Fingerhead hummed, now swirling his bottle between two fingers.

"THEN GIVE IT HERE." Fred extended an eager paw.

Fingerhead dryly obliged, grabbing the ceramic mug and glancing inside before turning it upside down. A single drop splattered onto the floor.

"All out, I'm afraid." he remarked idly, replacing the cup with casual slowness.

"You don't have any more!?"

"I do," Fingerhead folded his hands together. "But it brews overnight. Takes hours for any effect."

"You've got to be kidding me," Fred growled, his arms dropping like anchors. "What am I supposed to do now? Sue's probably galaxies away, and George can't handle this alone!"

Fingerhead pushed himself across the room in his wheeled chair. "Then just go. What's stopping you?"

"I can't help anyone like this! These migraines..." Fred's antlers quivered. "I'll make a fool of myself."

"You superheroes always look like fools to me," Fingerhead scoffed.

He turned away, manipulating a control panel that raised the floor beneath him into a platform at the top of his ship while his chair locked itself in the metal flooring.

"What are you doing?" Fred stumbled back.

"Taking you where you're wanted." The fisherman reached over the controls. "And better yet, getting you out of my tentacles."

Fred looked up, desperation creeping into his stance. "No! Look, other authorities will answer the call. We can just... stay here?"

Fingerhead froze, an unreadable glint crossing his features.

"Nah."

The determined alien began punching coordinates into the nav system. The engines roared to life, sending vibrations over the fishing decor.

"This is insanity!" Fred reached for a safety line before lurching with the ship. "You're in no condition to fly! You're sleep deprived and you've been drinking!"

In response, the vessel banked sharply to port, sending loose items skittering across the floor. Fred's stomach spun, threatening to spill its contents.

"Old Fingerhead, I am ORDERING you to cease all actions IMMEDIATELY!" Fred's voice cracked, lacking any power. "We need to think this through!"

Above, Fingerhead remained unmoved, bloodshot eyes fixed on the viewscreen as stars blurred past. "I'm done thinking," he muttered.

Fred gulped, stress reaching its peak as he fixed an unsteady gaze out the viewport. The planet shrank behind them and the ship groaned ominously under acceleration, with the stubborn fisherman guiding them deeper into the unknown.

Chapter 8: Surges

Chapter Summary

The broship crumbles.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The cosmic expanse stretched long and wide before the sailor, Old Fingerhead, who sang sea shanties as he navigated the celestial depths. The blue-skinned veteran perched lazily atop the cockpit platform steering the ancient spaceship heedlessly; his tipsy vocals weaving an eerie accord against the soundless tides of glittery oblivion.

Tentacles flowed gracefully from his head in an imaginary gentle current. Mouthbottom, forced to surrender his lucidity and let the whiskey absorb inside their shared body, drifted into a daze. Meanwhile, the sleek fishing vessel swerved side-to-side in a sleepy lull as if it too were serenaded by the senior's drunken sway.

The fluorescent glow from distant stars painted intricate patterns across the curved glass before him. His voice became the soundtrack to a universe devoid of mercy. A mercy that certainly did not exist within himself, being acutely aware of Fred's suffering below.

Fred pressed his paws against his temples, kneading his squishy features together like dough. He tried to calm the quaking headache that threatened to split his skull in half and spill out his inner rainbow of emotions. His special sense, still on the fritz, unable to function no matter what method of meditation.

"How's the weather down there, little hero?" Fingerhead called out, his words slipping and sliding. "Music cures all ailments, am I right?"

The leathery skin that stretched taut across the small alien's face flushed with irritation. "Could you please stop being so... you?" he managed through gritted teeth. "I'm trying to concentrate!"

Fingerhead squirmed with amusement after taking another long swig from his flask. "Oh, I'm sorry. Is the *whittle* Superhero feeling a *whittle* nervous?" he cooed; belching loudly without shame.

"I'm serious—STOP!"

But the fisherman paid no attention to him and carried on with his off-key singing. As he listened, Fred's grip on reality began to slip. The musical vibrations around him becoming a shrill, deafening ring, slowly unraveling the very fabric of his sanity.

His anxiety grabbed him by the throat and desperately he fought against the constricting grip of his seat belt, only for it to tighten in response around his thumping chest. He frantically clawed at the safety webbing that entangled him, feeling the panic escalate beyond control.

At last, after a short struggle that seemed to go on for eternity, he managed to untangle himself and break through the surface of his own suffocating hysteria with a shudder. On all fours he stayed put, catching his breath in short bursts on the floor.

The platform above descended with a steady mechanical whir. Fingerhead rose sorely from his chair and approached Fred with an aura of detachment. "What is your problem, short stack?" he queried, planting his hands firmly on his hips.

Fred pushed himself up, brushing the gritty dust from his suit. "My problem?" he echoed. "One minute you're being a total jerk, and the next..." He trailed, the words hanging for a moment. "You're just a lousy drunk."

The air became sour as Fred continued. "And now you're putting us both in danger without a care in the galaxy? You, Fingerhead. You *are* my problem!" Fred jabbed a firm finger towards the taller alien, only to have his hand swatted away dismissively.

"Oh, don't start nagging at me like that—you sound just like my ex-wives," Fingerhead retorted, rolling his eyes and waving his hand lazily.

"Well, maybe they had *good* reasons for leaving you."

"You really wanna go down that road, kid?" Fingerhead's voice lowered as he loomed over Fred. "Did you know you talk in your sleep? You went on and on about—Oh, what was it... something like Sue running off and getting married without your precious approval?" He mimed shock, covering an exaggerated gasp with one hand.

"Fingerhead... watch it."

"I assume you're not on the wedding guest list then, huh?" He leaned forward casually, hands tucked behind him. "Congrats, by the way."

Without another word, Fred shoved his opponent, causing him to stumble backwards and drop something from a loose pocket. The sound of metal clinking against the floor caught both aliens' attention—a ring. Fred's paw trembled when he reached down and picked up the small object, recognizing it as Sue's ring.

"Why do you have this?" Fred blinked rapidly, realizing there was only one ring adorning his paw. He had been wearing Sue's along with his own since the dreadful night she abandoned it.

Fingerhead stepped back, turning his head away. "Ah, fu—"

"You stole from me... while I was passed out?!" Fred shouted, inching closer.

"Don't act so shocked, Fred." Fingerhead stiffened. "After all, I'm just a no-good grumpy crook, right? Better get some *hoo*, someone might say!"

"Damnit, Fingerhead!" The hero stomped his foot. "I thought things were different this time! I wanted to give you a chance, hoping that... well, it doesn't matter. It was obviously a mistake to trust you. You clearly didn't change at all."

"CORRECT!" cheered Fingerhead with his arms aloof. "Let me tell you something, kid. Nobody ever changes—not me or you—and if Sue's smart enough to realize it she won't need this dumb thing anyway! It's a victimless crime!" His smile curled unnaturally while slipping the ring onto his own finger, flaunting it around fancifully.

"That ring is property of the Galactic Friends, old man!" Fred squared up. "Hand it over. Immediately."

"You want it so badly?" The sailor braced himself. "Come and get it."

Fred lunged forward, his compact body a blur of green-and-red striped motion. His head lowered like a charging bull's, ossicones on top aimed directly at Fingerhead's midsection. But the older alien was quicker, sliding sideways with an experienced maritime dodge.

The ship's navigation systems blinked warning signals, completely ignored by the two combatants that circled each other. Mouthbottom, trapped within Fingerhead's consciousness, could only watch in resignation, whimpering internally all the while the two enemies continued their brawl.

"You always were so overly emotional," Fingerhead growled, searching for the perfect opening to strike. "The Galactic Friends should've known better than to make you a superhero."

Fingerhead charged at his enemy with malicious valor, but Fred's response had been a swift headbutt directly into the solar plexus, sending the fisherman gasping for breath on the floor.

"Better emotional than a heartless criminal!"

Fred leapt onto him, pinning his writhing body to the ground. He clenched his fist, ready to strike the other's face, but Fingerhead had regained his composure in just enough time to hold the hero's fist mere inches from his nose.

"You *drugged* me just to *take* from me!" Fred roared before Fingerhead managed to twist his arm away in a swift and painful motion, causing him to fall to the floor next to him.

Fingerhead grabbed Fred in a choke hold. "I was trying to *help* you! I simply saw an opportunity and—"

That was it. Fred's sharp teeth dug into blue one's arms. He could taste the coppery blood that pooled around his mouth. Fingerhead yelped, more from shock than pain, and momentarily loosened his grip. The smaller alien wriggled free, his lower jaw painted with red.

Fingerhead tightly clutched his wounded arm, breathing heavily while stumbling onto his feet; his intense gaze never leaving his target. He took a step back, not out of retreat, but to steady himself for the fight that awaited.

"You... little..." he growled through clenched teeth, hot tears leaking from his eyes—yet they weren't truly his own.

"Brother, please stop this!" Young Mouthbottom cried, regaining his sense of self momentarily. "I'm scared!"

Fred hesitated. It was as if he heard a familiar plea from his own brother's voice cutting through his red vision; a momentary crack in his resolve.

The sudden distraction was just enough. Fingerhead lunged again with a roar. When his larger body made contact, it sent them both crashing against the ship's window. The fisherman gripped Fred's collar, holding him against the glass as the hero kicked and squirmed in response.

They were completely unaware of the strange shapes taking hold outside.

Fingerhead's focus dithered away from his victim for less than a blink when he saw it; a huge snake eye, glistening like polished emeralds, blinked steadily at him. Its serpentine body swept beneath the ship with a sound that reminded one of silk rustling timidly in the breeze.

The fisherman instantly released his grip on the squirming hero, his eyes widening in a mix of shock and recognition. He retreated backwards, and a faint whine slipped from his lips. Fred watched him, bewildered yet still guarded, carefully massaging his sore neck where bruises were forming.

"What? What's wrong with you?" he coughed, wiping the blood off his face.

"We gotta get the hell out of here." Fingerhead turned and rushed to ascend at the ship's controls. He moved as if it was his destiny; like this moment was one he prepared for his whole life.

Just as Fred was about to demand clarification, a forceful impact rocked the ship. They were both thrown towards the opposite side of the room, colliding into each other, reigniting the pain from their recent scuffle.

Fred gasped and instinctively clung to the arm next to him. "What is that?!"

Fingerhead shook uncharacteristically. "Star serpent," he muttered. "One of the electric variety. Damn rare. Damn dangerous."

The star serpent slithered into view from the window and Fred closed his eyes, attempting to tap into his special sense so he could intervene and influence calm over the beast. But the glint of the ring nearby still being worn by Fingerhead churned only a maelstrom of rage, betrayal, and confusion. He was unable to produce any essence of tranquility needed for the emotional projection.

"Screw this." Fingerhead shoved Fred aside, grabbing a loose safety line to climb up to the ship's controls. "I'll handle this my way!"

It wasn't long before the fishing vessel's laser cannons erupted with a burst of electric blue energy. Fingerhead's hands squeezed the steering wheel as he unleashed a barrage against the star serpent. The creature seemed to writhe and twist from the onslaught of pain and in a breathless turn of events, it slid away into the darkness.

"Ha!" Fingerhead bellowed, slapping the control panel. "See that, kid? Nothing to it!" He gleamed a lopsided grin at Fred who had made his way up beside him.

Fred, however, wasn't celebrating. His eyes narrowed, scanning the external viewscreen with growing dread. The serpent wasn't retreating. It was redirecting its attack onto another target.

"Oh no," Fred whispered. "Look."

In the distance, a massive bio-dome glimmered like a soap bubble suspended in the void. Hundreds of alien lives thrived within its translucent membrane; a beacon of blinking red light at the top of it signaling for help from the slithering death that approached.

Fingerhead zoned out at the sight. "Well would you look at that," he muttered, before turning back to the controls. "Oh well."

Chapter End Notes

THE GIRLS ARE FIGHTING AAAAA

also, careful there Fingerhead, your Rick Sanchez is showing.

Chapter 9: Under Currents

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As the star serpent swirled through the abyss, its colossal silhouette swallowed the stars, twisting ever closer to the bio-dome's blinking apex. That red beacon in the distance reflected off the hollow, empty gaze of Old Fingerhead. The fisherman's movements across the cockpit's controls were an all-too-familiar routine: detach, disengage, abandon.

Fred stood inches away when the realization struck him. His jaw hung slack, and disbelief shadowed over every inch of his face.

"Don't you dare!" he cried, lunging forward to grab Fingerhead's wrist. "There are innocent lives at stake! Do I need to remind you that *you* are the reason we're even here? That your *foolishness* dragged us into this mess!?"

Fingerhead yanked his arm free. "Sorry, hero," he dismissed, sights laser-focused on the nav display. "Plans have changed."

The seasoned alien moved again, faster this time, his hands darting over the control switches almost mechanically. A dose of panic drip-fed its way into Fred's chest; the urgency within slowly contorting into a determined rage.

"You... coward!" he barked, throwing himself at Fingerhead once more with newborn aggression.

In a flash, the two grappled for control of the ship in a frenzied tangle of limbs. Fred clung to Fingerhead's arm, using every ounce of strength he had to pull him away from the throttle; the confrontation activating buttons and toggles in a maddening blur. The ship pirouetted through the star-studded void in response.

"Get off of me!" Fingerhead clamored, desperately trying to stabilize their trajectory. "You're going to get us both killed!"

Through the viewscreen, the star serpent loomed even closer, its scales shimmering like shards of glass. Each undulation of its crystal-like body sent ripples through the fabric of space itself, distorting the very matter around it.

The two aliens' hands met on the control stick, their eyes locked in an incompatible battle of wills. With a defiant effort, they each wrenched the stick in opposite directions. The ship's engines screamed in protest as it banked sharply to and fro, the serpent steadily grew larger with each grunt and curse between them.

Soon the eye of the slimy behemoth had filled the entire viewscreen and Fred could see the speck of his own reflection, completely dwarfed by the vastness of its cornea.

In that fleeting moment, Fred's grip around the yoke loosened. This moment of weakness allowed Fingerhead to violently thrust the stick more than he anticipated; sending the ship to clip its wing at breakneck speed into the creature's dilated pupil.

The eye burst with a streak of catastrophic energy, its translucent membrane splitting open and releasing a barrage of static discharge from the wound. Sparks leapt inside the cockpit while tendrils of blue and white zipped across machinery, casting phantasmal shadows all around the occupants.

Fingerhead's hands jerked back from the control stick. "GAH! SON OF A—" he bellowed, the skin on his palms buzzing with numbness.

At the same time, Mouthbottom's mouth stretched open to let out a reverberating scream, causing a wave of sound to distort the air around them. The suffocating blaring and beeping of alarm systems only added to the chaos, bathing the interior in blood-red hues.

Fred barely registered the event before a lightning bolt struck his skull in one quick zap. His eyes rolled back, knees buckled, and then his body crumpled onto the floor, leaving the waking world behind.

To Fred, the darkness lasted less than a second. Then he heard Fingerhead's voice emerge from the blurry eddies of his consciousness; a soft pull that urged him back to the surface.

"Fred!? *FRED!*?" his voice broke through the murky haze again, like a life preserve thrown into a pitch-black ocean. "Come on, you stupid kid. Wake up!"

Slowly, against the tide of disorientation, he fought. The edges of reality began to sharpen and colors bled into focus, shadows waltzed into familiar shapes. But when the hero heard the serpent wailing from beyond the pale, it was as if his soul shrunk back into the darkness. He barely pushed back the fervent wish to surrender. Withdrawal seemed preferable over facing reality.

Then a stinging slap to the face brought Fred back with a gasp.

"Thank goodness..." Mouthbottom sighed, his tentacled mouth hanging loose.

"Fred," Fingerhead breathed. "Are you—"

Without warning, tears had welled up unbidden in Fred's eyes. He reached out blindly, desperate for something solid, to keep himself from floating away. He found Fingerhead's arm—a blood-stained patchwork he himself had inflicted—and gripped it tightly.

"It's alright, Fred, relax," Fingerhead coaxed, trying to reassure the remaining jitters from the hero. The smoky imprint on Fred's forehead still sizzled all the while he was held.

Clearer spatial awareness slowly came back to him, and the bite marks on Fingerhead's arm came into focus. The dry blood had stained red streaks across his suit. With a wince he shifted away, but Fingerhead simply half-smiled at this before he stood up and extended a hand.

"We don't have much time." Fingerhead glanced toward the viewport.

Sue's ring glinted around the sailor's finger, reminding Fred of the broken trust. Yet he chose to accept his hand anyway with his own still trembling, pulling himself up with a groan.

"The serpent," Fred mumbled under his breath, wiping away tears and gathering his surroundings further. The cockpit was a dimly lit mess of burnt wires and broken machinery. "Where..."

Just then, Fred sucked in the air forcefully through clenched teeth. A sudden tingling of left-over static surge through him, bringing about a forgotten intimate understanding that was his special sense. It was a reunion born promptly by the serpent's electrical jolt.

That previously dormant sixth-sense told him the whole story in an instant. Local authorities arrived as backup in a phalanx of battleships, now at war with the threat that hovered near the bio-dome. Lasers blasted against electrical currents. Every laser blast dissipated against the foe's labyrinthine exterior with an anticlimactic sizzle, like raindrops evaporating on scorching metal.

Fred's fists clenched at his sides as he sensed from afar, helplessness threatening to swallow him whole. The authorities were giving it everything they had, courageously reckless in their assault. But it was clear to him they were on the losing side.

"Listen, Fred," came Fingerhead's voice, breaking through Fred's trance. It was subdued, measured, and almost hesitant. Yet it carried a weight that made Fred turn to face him immediately.

He gazed at the chaos outside before facing Fred. "We have to leave them to it. I'm sorry, but... you were right."

With a long sigh, Fingerhead turned back toward the scene unfolding beyond. His vision lingered on the flashes of light: red and violet streaks crisscrossing against relentless bolts of white-hot energy tossed taunting patterns across his weathered face.

"I am a coward."

Fred blinked. The words rang hollowly in the silence that followed inside the cockpit. He opened his mouth to respond but found himself at a loss for words as he tried to process what he'd just heard.

Fingerhead retired into his chair at the controls. The ship groaned in protest as its systems struggled to comply with his commands, its frame shuddering under its extensive damage.

It was a strained and raspy sound when it finally emerged. A ghost of its usual strength. But Fred had found his voice, and with it a resolve more stubborn than ever.

"No." He limped forward and leaned over Fingerhead's chair, forcing himself into the other's line of sight. "No you are not."

Fingerhead quietly scoffed but didn't look away. There was something rebellious in his expression now; as though daring Fred to prove him wrong.

"You don't want to do this," Fred continued earnestly. "I can sense it—not just from Mouthbottom or anyone else—it's *you*." he pointed. "You're afraid... but that doesn't make you a coward."

A spell of vulnerability seemed to cast itself upon the fisherman and for a while he said nothing. His pupils ricocheted between Fred and the distant battleground outside. The gears turning in his head seemed to cause him physical pain.

"Fin Fin?" Mouthbottom quietly chirped, the childish nickname pushing the older sibling over the edge of an impossible decision.

"And *what* exactly are you going to do, *huh!*?" he finally cracked, flailing his arms about. "You expect me to dive-bomb into certain *doom!*? I mean, *look* at that monster! The only reasonable thing to do—for everyone—*IS RUN FOR THE DAMN HILLS!*"

Fingerhead was panting now, his chest heaving as he glared daggers at Fred, but the persistent little hero simply responded with a faint trace of a grin, leaning closer.

"I have a plan."

With an unexpected flourish, Fred's focus switched to a nearby wall adorned with an impressive display of vinyl records. He ran his paw along the collection with laser-sharp precision, searching for something specific. Fingerhead watched in bewilderment, wondering if the little guy had finally gone off the deep end.

When Fred's finger landed on a particular album, his antlers perked up. "Ah-ha," he exclaimed; pulling out the record and giving it an admiring spin as if it were a former lover. "Ho yeah... this will work just fine."

Fingerhead squinted at the cover. "Is that...?" he trailed off, a sudden blue tinge spread across his face. "What *exactly* are you planning, kid?"

Chapter End Notes

FIN FIN COME AND SEE HIM :D

(if you understand that reference you can now sit at the cool kids table)

Chapter 10: Fracture

George's floating form paced the control room of his family's ship. Each of his hands fidgeted with something different: one twisted the hem of his jeans, another brushed against the metal walls, while the remaining two frantically wrestled with each other.

The pink hue of his skin glistened under the ship's fluorescent lights, beads of sweat catching the glow across his forehead. His wide, baby blue eyes darted from one corner of the room to another, searching for answers that simply weren't there.

Sue and Bob watched him from their positions in the control room, though neither dared to speak. Instead, they idly listened to the fuzzy, low volume distress signal they were currently responding to.

Sue stood near the viewport, her arms crossed tightly over her chest as if shielding herself from an invisible chill. Her brow furrowed and her lips pressed into a thin line.

Bob remained seated at the pilot's chair, his fingers twitching an uneven rhythm on the armrest. The silence between them was almost suffocating, as if each of them feared that speaking out loud would confirm their worst suspicions.

George broke it with a ragged sigh. "We should've heard from him by now."

George winced at the memory of leaving Fred alone to simmer in his own anger. Later that night, after reuniting with Sue and Bob, he had cried himself to sleep in his sister's arms. Now, with unanswered calls and responsibilities piling up, an even greater dread swelled.

Bob cleared his throat and leaned forward in his seat. "Easy there, big guy," he eased. "We don't know for sure if Fred is even there. He doesn't have a ship—he could be... I don't know... holed up somewhere safe? Maybe he..."

"Safe?" George echoed. He stopped mid-air and turned to face Bob, his four hands clenching into tight fists at his sides. "If he were safe, he'd answer my calls! You think Fred would just sit around while I'm losing my mind over here? Or ignore an emergency? No way."

Sue stepped forward then, her expression careful as she reached out to George's shoulder.

"George," she began, "I need you to focus. We're going to find Fred—I promise you that." She tightened her grip slightly, forcing him to meet her gaze. "But we have to concentrate on what we *can* do right now. One step at a time, okay?"

Her brother froze under her stare. His breathing slowed, but even as he nodded reluctantly, a memory surfaced; a vivid flashback from their childhood.

He saw Fred as a cub again, smaller than George but always an unstoppable force. The Galactic Friends Orphanage had been their home. That chaotic mishmash of alien species all crammed into one creaking old space station.

George remembered sitting in the corner of their shared room, tears streaming silently down his cheeks after being bullied by an older kid during meal time. Back then, he hadn't yet learned to speak and gestures failed him when he tried to explain what had happened.

Fred hadn't needed him to.

The younger version of his brother had marched out of their room with fists clenched and an expression so fierce it had startled even George. What followed was like a mystery movie: Fred interrogating every child in sight with a purpose that painted him as an absurd mini detective until he found out who had hurt George. By the end of it all, Fred had returned triumphant, dragging the culprit by the ear and demanding an apology that left even the orphanage staff speechless.

As the memory faded back into the present, George's lips tightened. Fred had always been there for him. Even if he didn't always make it clear, he had his own way of showing love. Ever since the wreck, Fred's love was harder to translate, but it was still there. He knew it was.

"Do you hate him?" George blurted suddenly in a muddled whisper.

Sue blinked at the question, her hand falling away from his shoulder as she stepped back.

"What?" she asked softly.

"Fred," George clarified, though the accusation in his tone was unmistakable now. "Do you hate him?"

The air went cold. For several agonizing seconds, Sue said nothing. Her lips parted and closed, searching for the right words. When she finally found them, she took a shaky step closer to him and cupped his face gently between her hands. Her thumbs brushed against the dampness on his cheeks where sweat—or tears—had gathered unnoticed.

"No," she breathed. "No, George—I don't hate him." She paused briefly before speaking more quietly. "I could never hate him."

George's face scrunched up like a dam about to burst as he floated higher above her. "Then WHY did you leave?!" The shout from him exposed years worth of bottled-up pain and frustration.

"I couldn't..." Sue faltered briefly before forcing herself to continue. "I couldn't stay anymore—not when everything felt so broken between us."

Retreating from her, George let his unfiltered thoughts free. "We could have talked things out... found some middle ground—but you ran away, leaving both of us to fend for ourselves, like always!"

Before either sibling could say more, Bob's voice cut through them. "Guys!" he barked from where he sat, gripping tightly onto controls that shook violently from the nearing space serpent's destructive pull. "This isn't a good time! Please! We're almost there."

Without another word, Sue abruptly turned on her heel and excused herself from the control room. Her sudden departure was so jarring that neither Bob nor George could address it immediately.

She reached the ship's bathroom. A sterile, metallic enclave lit by soft LED panels. Pausing at the threshold, her hand lingered on the doorframe. Then, with a deep breath that barely steadied her, she stepped inside and pressed the lock button. The light click of the lock resounded like an anchor dropping into the ocean of George's guilt-stricken heart.

"Sue?" Bob peeped.

Quickly he began flipping a few switches to set the ship on autopilot before abandoning his station. Reaching the locked door, he knocked timidly, as though afraid that anything louder might shatter her.

"Honey," he coaxed. "Sue, open up. Talk to me. Please."

Inside the bathroom, Sue sat on the small fold-out bench against the wall, her hands covered her mouth. Tears gathered at the corners of her eyes but she blinked them away furiously.

Bob pressed his forehead against the cool metal of the door, closing his eyes. "I know you're hurting," he continued, "but you don't have to go through this alone." His hand rested flat against the door, hoping she could feel his sincerity through the barrier between them.

Still no reply.

Meanwhile, George stood frozen near the control panel, his mind racing while his body remained rigid. He knew why she had walked away, but he never intended to vilify her. He hadn't meant for things to spiral like this; hadn't meant for Sue to bear so much pain while he stood by helplessly every time she and Fred argued.

He turned away from Bob and Sue's closed-door conversation and let his blurry vision wander to the viewport. The bio-dome loomed ahead, sticking out in the black void surrounding it. Each flash of light was accompanied by a soundless ripple of energy. And then came that sound. The serpent's roar.

George imagined Fred trapped there in various scenarios. He shook his head violently, trying to dislodge the haunting images from his mind. Bob turned back briefly from where he stood, catching sight of George's expression.

"We'll stop it," Bob said, though something in him faltered when he added, "but we need a plan first."

"There's no time for plans."

Bob frowned, stepping away from the door reluctantly to join George at the console. "You can't just rush in blind," he argued, gesturing toward the viewport where another bright flash illuminated. "That thing is unpredictable—and who knows what else is waiting for us out there?"

George spun around to face him. "If Fred's out there—if he's alive—then sitting here doing nothing isn't an option!"

Bob opened his mouth to retort but stopped short when George slammed his palm against the flat surface of the control panel. The sound rang through the room like a gunshot.

"If I let fear keep me here," George continued, each word fiercely dripping off his large fangs, "and something happens to him because I waited too long... I'll never forgive myself."

The explorer could not reason with the soldier. George was already flying toward the exit.

"George!" Bob shouted after him.

But he didn't stop. He didn't even look back after he entered the code sequence in the door's terminal and zoomed outside. Bob ran towards the exit, but when the serpent's roar grew louder, he recoiled at its intensity and turn abruptly; running so quickly that he misjudged his footing and collided face-first into the bathroom door with a loud thud.

The noise startled Sue enough that she unlocked and opened it just in time to see Bob stumble backward clutching his face.

"Bob!" she gasped, rushing forward instinctively before her eyes darted around in confusion. "What happened? Where's—?"

"George! He—he went out there! Alone!" Bob blurted out breathlessly, barely regaining his footing.

Sue froze mid-motion, her hands still gripping Bob's arms for support as reality sank in like icy daggers.

"He's gone." Bob gestured to where George had disappeared. "He thinks Fred is—and that thing—he's going to—"

He lost all coherence at that point, though it didn't seem to matter. His rambling was overshadowed by a increasing ring in Sue ears.

Chapter 11: Interference

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George burst through the vacuum of space, his four arms clenched tight against his body. The debris field stretched before him in a graveyard of twisted metal and shattered glass. He maneuvered through the macabre obstacle course with hardened purpose. Each thrust of his body propelled him deeper into the carnage, where the serpent waited, coiled amidst the wreckage of once-proud starships.

From afar, the creature was awe-inspiring; a river of scales that momentarily stopped George in his tracks. Electricity crackled along its body, lighting the remaining defensive ships around it.

He observed the squadron of fighters intercepting the beast. Their lasers traced bright lines across the serpent's hide, but it shrugged off the attack. A flick of its tail sent two fighters spinning into the darkness like pesky flies.

George, with a furious flex of his arms, hurled himself at the creature. The distance between them closed with incredible speed. At the last possible moment, the serpent's massive head swiveled, its eyes locking onto the pink hurtling toward it.

He struck the serpent's midsection like a living missile, the impact sending vibrations through the creature's entire length. Scales rippled in waves from the point of contact, and the serpent's body reflexively tightened, interrupting its assault on the space troops.

George barely had time to brace himself before the creature executed a roll, spinning along its longitudinal axis blindly. The sudden movement threw off George's next move, his punch missing its mark and striking empty space, giving the monster a chance to change its course, meeting him again with a swift headbutt.

The collision did little to discourage the multi-armed soldier. He recovered almost instantly. Continuously he tried the same technique, but when he did manage to strike his target once more, the creature's scales shifted, edges rising like the hackles of an enraged predator. What had been merely armor now became weaponized.

Pain lanced across George's forearm as one of those edge-scales sliced through his skin. The cut was a perfect surgical line that immediately welled with globs of blood, beading into spheres and creating a floating trail of crimson behind him.

George gritted his teeth, momentarily halting his attack. Then he was off again, manipulating gravitational forces—the same ability that allowed him to fly—to slingshot himself around the serpent, building momentum for its softer underbelly.

The serpent, however, had anticipated this move. As George approached, its tail section whipped forward. The hero could hear his bones cracking in a single explosive burst.

The transfer of force sent George hurtling away, spinning uncontrollably. More blood joined the expanding cloud, creating tiny red moons that orbited around him. His vision tunneled as consciousness threatened to flee.

The trajectory of the serpent's blow had carried him into a dense field of battle debris. A piece of jagged metal drifted past his face, close enough that he could see his distorted reflection in its polished surface. The trusty green cap that never left his head hung askew. George reached up weakly to straighten it—a small, but defiant gesture.

Then a static buzz alerted him to the communicator on his wrist.

"George? George, can you hear me?" Sue's voice crackled through the device. Only static answered her, punctuated by occasional labored breathing.

Still adrift, George's hand closed around a chunk of hull plating, pulling it toward himself. His gravitational manipulation made it respond as if magnetized to his touch. Another piece followed; a chunk of hull plating here, a twisted support beam there. Each piece added to his collection, clutched tightly to his chest as he continued to float directionless.

As he worked, he kept one eye on the serpent, tracking its movements, calculating distance and trajectory. When he had gathered enough debris, he began the next phase of his plan.

Extending all four arms, he called upon his gravitational powers in a new way—not to move himself, but to compress the floating junkyard around him. The metal groaned and twisted as invisible forces pressed it inward, condensing it into a single mass.

Sweat beaded on George's forehead, feeling the strain this advanced manipulation placed on his wounded body. He channeled every ounce of his remaining strength into a single, devastating push. The compressed debris shot forward like a rocket. The recoil sent George tumbling backward, fresh pain erupting from his broken ribs.

It was a direct hit. Yet, it still wasn't enough. The serpent regained its composure shortly afterward. George, now realizing the futility of his efforts, simply lowered his arms and let his body go limp.

Aboard the Galactic Friends' ship, Sue's hair fell across her face as she sat inside the control room, clutching her communicator close to her chest. Bob hunched over her shoulder and squinted, searching for George through the main viewport.

A burst of static, then a voice. "Hey Sue," George's voice. Threaded with gravel, but nonetheless alive. "I'm here. Thing's... strong."

Sue sighed out a chuckle, a free hand reaching blindly for support which Bob quickly obliged to.

"So I hear," she replied, forcing lightness into her tone. "But hey, listen to me. You need to withdraw, George. Come back to us, or... or I'm gonna go get you myself."

"Don't," came George's response, stronger now. "I gotta keep trying."

"You got this, George!" Bob said with unexpected aggression, taking the device in his own hands. "You might just be our only hope, buddy. You can do it!"

Sue flashed shock at her fiancé. "Bob! Why would you say that? You're putting him in even greater danger!"

"He made a choice," Bob replied, unflinching. "The same choice any of us would make in his position. I'd do the same for you. He's not giving up, so why not support him?"

Deep down, she knew Bob was right. She knew George would never retreat, not with Fred potentially in danger. The stubbornness was a family trait, one she recognized in herself.

This was what it meant to be a Galactic Superhero. To place the safety of others above your own. It was the oath she had taken, the life she had chosen. Though sometimes it didn't even feel like a choice. She was destined since birth for this role and no matter how hard she tried, it was the one thing she couldn't hide away from.

Her gaze drifted to the engagement ring on her finger. The diamond at its center; a rare star crystal from Bob's most recent expedition. It was beautiful. A symbol of their love right where her insignia ring would have been. It felt heavier now.

"I should be out there with him," she whispered with a tremor.

Bob froze, his expression displaying a seriousness Sue had never seen before. "Sue, no. I won't allow it. I can't..."

He attempted to reach out to her, but she pulled away with finality. "My duties do not need your approval, Bob," she barked. "Does this ring give you the right to tell me that?"

"Your powers aren't offensive," Bob argued, but it took on an edge of desperation. "You can heal, yes, but what happens when the serpent turns on you? You'd be another target, another distraction George has to worry about."

"I am not some delicate ornament to be protected, Captain. I've put myself between danger many times."

"I'm not saying you haven't! It's just... unnecessary—I mean, Sue, you can bring back the dead for crying out loud! Why risk yourself?"

"I can't bring George back if vital parts of him are missing—devoured by some beast!"

"But you can't bring *yourself* back now can you!?"

The logic of his words penetrated Sue's spiritual armor. Still, she couldn't help but feel like she was on a leash.

The songstress scanned her fiancé's eyes, truly seeing the man she loved: an adventurous captain who had captivated her with dreams beyond battles and sacrifices. Now, witnessing his struggle with the dangers and responsibilities of loving her, she saw fear. Not just for her safety, but for what their relationship might cost them both.

Fred had warned her about this, in his blunt, tactless way. *"Love is a luxury in our line of work,"* he'd said. *"A distraction we can't afford."*

She had dismissed his concerns as his typical paranoia, but now, with George fighting for his life and Fred missing, his words haunted her.

"This is all my fault." She covered her face. "I never should have left."

Bob didn't need to ask what she meant by that. "No, it's not. Fred made his choices too. You can't take responsibility for that."

"Can't I?" She lowered her hands, revealing the glistening of unshed tears. "I left them. I walked away from Fred. And now George might die trying to find him."

Bob stayed silent, too emotionally exhausted to find the right words. All he could muster was a step forward to hold her hands in his, the ring glinting back at him.

Sue gazed out the viewport. "I'm going out there."

Bob looked at her, really looked at her, and in that moment saw not just the woman he loved but the warrior she was. His expression shifted to a grim understanding.

Slowly, Sue slipped out of Bob's squeezing hold. Then she turned and took a step toward the exit.

It happened without warning; a sudden rush of sensation that swept through Sue like a solar wind. The emergency alarms, Bob's voice, the serpent on the viewport—all of it receded, replaced by a flood of perplexing images that allowed time itself to pause its forward march.

This had happened before, rarely, in moments of extreme stress or during her deepest harmonizing sessions. Her natural abilities sometimes transcended the boundaries of conventional space and time, allowing her glimpses of what will be.

The vision sharpened and she could see him clearly. Fred. Her brother stood inside a ship that wasn't theirs, seemingly very upset about something. Beside him was Old Fingerhead, whose tentacles twitched with shared agitation. They were arguing, their voices silent in Sue's vision, but their body language conveyed the intensity of their disagreement.

Then, inexplicably, they were laughing together in a field of mangled metal, an unlikely camaraderie that shocked Sue to her core. The vision zoomed outward, revealing a different scene in time. They were aboard Fingerhead's fishing vessel, approaching the bio-dome.

They had a plan. Something involving music and Fred's special sense. A crowd of cheering colonists told her that whatever it was had worked. Somehow.

As suddenly as it had come, the vision began to dissolve. Sue fought to hold onto the images, to extract any additional details that might help, but they slipped through her mental grasp like starlight through fingers.

Through the clearing, she could hear Bob's voice calling her name. She blinked, the afterimages of the vision still ghosting across her consciousness.

"It's okay... I'm back."

"What did you see?" Bob asked, searching her face for answers. He knew of Sue's visions theoretically, but witnessing one remained rare.

She settled for the essential truth, knowing her gift defied simple explanation. "I saw Fred. He's with... Old Fingerhead. They're here, working together to save the colony."

Bob's features contorted with disbelief. "Fingerhead? The Hoo Hoo hater? The one who—" he caught himself. "That's... unexpected."

"I can't explain how," she began. "As far as the future's concerned, they'll have the serpent under control, but our primary role now is to... well, wait and see, I guess."

Bob stared at her, confusion evident in the furrow of his brow. "But you said—"

"I'm standing down," she announced, the decision solidifying as she spoke.

Sue hovered over the launch controls, sights focused on the stars. The urgency that had filled her moments ago receded, replaced by a newfound certainty.

Bob watched her carefully. "Are you sure?"

She nodded, sitting sternly in the chair. "I'm sure. I just need to tell George so he can be safe with us. I couldn't see him in my vision..."

Without warning, Bob pulled her against his chest, his heart hammering against her ear. "Thank you," he whispered, then straightened. "N-not that I had any influence of your choice, of course. I just—"

"I know," Sue interrupted, though not unkindly. She understood his concern came from love, even as part of her resented the implication that she needed protection or permission.

As Bob relaxed into promised security, his lips found hers, and they melded together, momentarily ignoring the crisis unfolding.

In the void beyond, George's battle continued. His injuries had transformed his child-like spirit into something unrecognizable. Each movement came at tremendous cost, his lungs struggling to recycle oxygen. The serpent circled him like a predatory shark, with George like wounded prey in the water.

He watched numbly as the creature's body formed a deliberate spiral around him. Electricity built within its scales, creating a donut of brilliant energy. A perfect circle of destructive power that grew stronger by the second.

When the wave hit him, it engulfed his body in a cocoon of light. The pain was beyond anything George had experienced before. Beyond what anyone should be capable of

enduring. Branching patterns scorched his skin where energy sought exit points, creating livid marks like lightning frozen in flesh. When it finally dissipated, George hung motionless, unconscious.

"Hello? George? What happened!?"

Static.

"George, I had a vision! Fred is—"

Silence.

Chapter End Notes

heck yeah it's time for more character depth and exploration of their powers wanna fight about it

also how the heck do these characters and creatures breathe in space? Iunno, recycled alien air I guess

Chapter 12: Fly Me to the Moon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Amidst the cosmic battlefield, a noise erupted from an unknown source. An abrupt earsplitting feedback that infiltrated all communication channels simultaneously. The star serpent's electrical currents momentarily short-circuited, leaving every ship, every weapon, and every beating heart in the sector suspended in shared bewilderment.

From behind the veil of stellar dust, a silhouette materialized: Fingerhead's fishing vessel, its damaged hull seemingly held together by stubborn will alone. Its engines purred rather than roared, giving the impression it had casually strolled into the apocalypse.

The serpent's massive head swiveled toward this new arrival, eyeing the trinket-festooned exterior; trophies from countless fishing expeditions. Lightning storms arced between its teeth, poised for another devastating attack, yet something in the ship's approach gave even the fearsome creature pause.

The vessel's dome split down the middle with a hydraulic hiss, retracting with theatrical slowness to reveal a circular platform rising from within. Atop it sat not a weapon, not a tactical device, but a single chair. And in that chair, lounging with all the casual indifference of an interstellar monarch, was Old Fingerhead.

He reclined with one leg draped over an armrest fashioned from a repurposed harpoon gun, wearing an expression of someone who had spent centuries perfecting dramatic entrances.

His trademark pink fishing overalls, faded from years of use, revealed glimpses of skin through strategic square patches—the common fashion choice of his species which dubiously added to the absurdity.

Exterior lights activated on the vessel, creating a spotlight effect centered on his lounging form. The criminal took an unhurried swig from his bottle before setting it aside with the careful precision of the slightly inebriated.

Then he leaned forward, bringing a microphone to his lips with an intimacy that bordered on seductive parody.

"Hello, gorgeous," Fingerhead purred, his voice crackling through every ship's intercom system. His tone suggested he was addressing not a deadly cosmic predator but a potential conquest at a dive bar.

The serpent's head drew back slightly, rage giving way to confusion at this unexpected development.

Fingerhead chuckled. "Oh, sweetheart. I know your type—all flash and fury, looking for attention in all the wrong places." He shifted, leaning back with exaggerated nonchalance.

"But you know what? *I like that.*"

He adjusted his position, somehow making the simple act of sitting straighter look like a dance move from some forbidden burlesque show.

"You know, I've fished the void for centuries, caught everything from sun-sharks to satellite-jellyfish, but I've never seen anything quite like you." He winked. "You've got... spark."

With a snap of his fingers, the ship's external speakers crackled to life. A sultry jazz tune began to play; the kind of smoky, slow-tempo melody that belonged in dimly lit clubs where snobby patrons spoke in whispers and deals were made in shadows.

"You've been a bad, bad serpent," he chastised with unmistakable delight.

Then Fingerhead began to sing. His voice poured out like aged whiskey over ice. Smooth in delivery but burning with a weathered intensity that soothed the soul. Each note resonated with a gravitational pull of its own, drawing the serpent closer.

Standing at the viewport below Fingerhead's platform, Fred maintained his characteristic authoritative posture, though something had shifted in his demeanor. There was a barely suppressed curve of his lips, a gleam in his colorful eyes that suggested not just relief but genuine pride.

The hero had predicted this outcome, but never imagined Fingerhead would surrender to his role with such abandon. He took quiet satisfaction in having recognized the fisherman's untapped vocal talent inspired by their drunken karaoke the night before.

His special sense detected the emotional shift within the massive creature. The territorial aggression was giving way to curious wonderment. Though not a complete transformation, it was just enough of a foothold to exploit.

These emotional broadcasts embedded in the fabric of his suit. Patches of color swirled and blended across the neurological detecting fibers, transforming the uniform into a canvas of emotional expression.

Where the fisherman's voice dipped low, Fred's colors cooled to deep blues and purples that swirled in hypnotic patterns. When the melody climbed, so too did the colors, shifting to vibrant yellows and oranges that pulsed with the rhythm.

The serpent's attention locked onto this sensory feast, its massive form swaying gently in response. They only needed to maintain the connection long enough to lead it away from the bio-dome, guiding it back to the deeper reaches of space where it could return to endangered obscurity.

Above him, bathed in artificial spotlight and organic starlight, Fingerhead struck a final pose as the song's intro ended and the main melody began. In that moment, Fingerhead wasn't a criminal or an outcast or even a fisherman.

He was, against all odds and expectations, a star.

The scales along the serpent's body rippled in fluctuations that matched Fingerhead's tempo. Colors flowed from head to tail in waves that complemented rather than clashed with Fred's projection. When Fingerhead gave pause to stare in awe, the creature actually nudged the ship with its snout, encouraging him to continue.

With a chuckle and renewed vigor, Fingerhead launched into the next verse. He extended a hand toward the serpent in a gesture that was part invitation, part showmanship.

The creature responded by coiling itself around the ship like a loving embrace. Without missing a beat, Fingerhead tilted his head toward the distant stars, then back to the serpent, the gesture clear: Follow us away from here.

The serpent hesitated, its massive head swiveling briefly back toward the bio-dome with its hundreds of potential prey. For a heart-stopping moment, it seemed the creature might resist the suggestion, might return to its original destructive purpose.

Then, with a fluidity that belied its enormous size, it continued circling Fingerhead's ship, electrical discharge forming a pattern that resembled submission to the trained eye. It was ready to follow.

Meanwhile, consciousness returned to George in fragments. Through the haze of his injuries, he glimpsed what surely must be a fever dream: Old Fingerhead, sworn nuisance of the Galactic Superheroes, singing, while beams of colored light—unmistakably Fred's emotional projections—danced from his ship in perfect harmony with the same serpent that nearly killed him.

George blinked rapidly, certain that his damaged brain was conjuring impossible visions. Yet the mirage refused to dissolve; instead, it grew more detailed as time went on.

"Fred?" George whispered but the word floated away, lost to the void.

Movement caught his peripheral vision. the Galactic Friends' vessel, piloted by Sue and Bob. Reassurance washed over him, though he couldn't summon the strength to signal them.

Aboard the approaching ship, Sue's eyes widened as they fixed on George's floating figure. "There!" she cried, pointing the way. "Bob, hurry!"

"I see him. Deploying grappler now."

Sue pressed her palm against the cold viewport, as if trying to reach her brother through sheer force of will. Their earlier argument seemed trivial now. The ship's mechanical arm extended from its underbelly, metal digits unfolding like a gentle giant's.

"Easy," Bob murmured to himself. "Easy does it."

The grappler closed around George, cradling rather than gripping him, then retracted slowly. Sue was already moving, racing toward the entry point.

Below her the mechanism cycled with agonizing slowness. When the arm finally emerged, Sue was at her brother's side instantly. Her hair tied back in a hasty knot revealed the

concentrated focus of a healer about to work.

"Oh, George," she croaked, her delicate hands scanning the damage. "What were you thinking?"

"Hi, Sue," he managed, his deep voice reduced to a hoarse whisper.

Tears fell freely from the songstress, no longer hiding behind composure. She embraced her emotions openly, letting George see her vulnerability.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "I never should have left you."

S'okay," he slurred. "You're here now." Deep down he knew she was referring to their time on the Red Planet.

George's skin was a map of trauma. Lacerations from the serpent's scales crisscrossed his arms, electrical burns branched into angry red marks and deep bruising had turned large patches of his normally vibrant coloration to a dull purple.

The medical bay door slid open with a soft hiss, and Bob entered, carrying a portable monitoring device. His expression brightened when he saw George conscious.

"Our patient's awake," he chirped as he approached the makeshift examination table. "How're you feeling, George?"

George managed a smile. "Like I picked a fight with an electric space snake," he huffed, "and lost. Badly."

Sue laughed quietly, glancing over the readings. "Three broken ribs. Dislocated shoulders—both left arms. Multiple lacerations, some deep enough to have damaged muscle tissue. And electrical burns covering about twenty percent of your body."

George's smile turned rueful. "Is that all?"

"Yeah... you may have survived the serpent," Bob added, "but I doubt you're gonna survive Fred's wrath when he finds out what you tried to do."

George's eyes widened with sudden urgency. "Fred," he blurted, attempting to sit up despite his injuries. "Is he—"

"Easy," Sue pressed him gently back down. "Fred's fine. More than fine, actually. He's..." She glanced at Bob.

"Putting on quite a show," Bob finished, his lips quirking, "along with his new performance partner."

"Performance partner? So that wasn't some weird hallucination from blood loss?"

Sue shook her head, and the reality hit George fully. He found himself laughing until it transformed into a pained groan as his broken ribs protested.

"Those are some pretty impressive battle scars," Bob offered, moving medical scanners away. "The ladies will be impressed."

George chuckled. "You think so?"

"Absolutely. Chicks dig scars. Isn't that right, babe?"

Sue merely rolled her eyes before closing them, centering herself. When she began to sing, the sound filled the room with impossible tranquility.

The notes wrapped around George's injuries like bandages woven from sound itself. Where her voice touched, pain receded. Lacerations began to close, burns faded to healthy pink, and bruises lightened from a harsh purple to soft lavender before disappearing entirely.

Bob watched in respectful silence, as he always did when Sue worked her healing magic. No matter how many times he witnessed it, the fascination never diminished.

When Sue reached the final measures, George's four arms moved in a tentative stretch, testing their newly restored functionality.

"Thanks, sis," he sighed. "For everything."

Sue smiled. "Don't try to fly or move too much. You'll probably be sore for quite awhile and your powers need time to recover."

George ignored her caution and insisted on being helped to the control room to observe the ongoing spectacle. Sue relented, supporting his weight as they moved toward the viewport. Bob adjusted the magnification, bringing the distant scene into focus.

There, Fingerhead had apparently decided his performance needed an additional visual element. He pantomimed casting a fishing line toward the serpent. With exaggerated motions, he pretended to hook the creature, then mimed reeling it in as the serpent played along.

"I wish I had a recording of this," George said, dumbfounded.

"Oh, I got you covered," Bob confirmed, already pointing his video camera at the bizarre scene. "This is going straight into my expedition log of oddities."

Laughter flooded the cockpit. It was a welcome release after the tension of the crisis. When it died down, George tilted his head, studying his brother's emotional lights.

"Fred seems... happy?"

Sue nodded. "I had a vision before we came to get you. Fred was smiling when I saw them together." She placed a finger on her chin. "They make a... an interesting team."

"They're leading it away," Bob observed.

Sue's strategic mind shifted gears. "We should help the injured while they handle the serpent. There were several fighter ships hit during the battle."

Without hesitation, Bob adjusted their course, bringing them closer to the debris field where damaged vessels drifted.

Sue's hand lingered on George's arm. "Fred will be okay."

George sighed contentedly, watching his brother and former enemy guide the serpent through the stars.

Chapter End Notes

YOU LIKE JAZZZZ?

Chapter 13: Interplay

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The first warning came as a discordant tremble that shuddered through the fishing vessel's hull; steel singing against steel in an unwelcome harmony.

The hero registered the change immediately. Above, Fingerhead's singing wavered ever so slightly, a hitch that might have gone unnoticed by anyone else, but to Fred, it was the second warning siren.

It wasn't long before Fingerhead's confident swagger disappeared entirely when the platform beneath him quivered again. The music scratched out in fragments from the failing speaker system, making his tentacles stiffen. A shaky laugh escaped the fisherman when the star serpent honed in, inquisitively, on his twitching facial features.

"Steady now," Fred murmured under his breath, intensifying his emotional projection to compensate for the disruption. The colors flowing from the viewport brightened in an attempt to keep the creature's attention.

Another tremor rattled through the ship, more violent than the last. A section of hull plating near the stern broke free, spinning away into the darkness. The engines coughed, deteriorating into an asthmatic wheeze.

"C'mon, old girl," Fingerhead growled between verses. "Not. Now."

The serpent recoiled, emerald eyes narrowing into slits as they focused more intently on the performer. A low threatening rumble began to build from deep within its throat and in response a bead of sweat ran down Fingerhead's nose.

The vessel turned sideways when a stabilizer failed. Fingerhead stumbled back onto the pilot's chair, clutching it desperately to keep from losing his footing.

"Fred!" he cried out, prompting a startled squeak from the serpent.

Fred pressed his hands against the glass, his special sense stretching to its limits. But his own anxiety contaminated the projection with rapid streaks cutting through the soothing hues.

Fear—not for himself but for his beloved vessel—bled through Fingerhead's conscience. The emotion was so raw, so unguarded, that it momentarily overwhelmed Fred's projection.

The serpent coiled tight around itself in a defensive posture. The electrical discharge intensified, no longer decorative. It was priming its weapon.

"No, no," Fred strained, fingers splaying wider against the glass.

It was too late. The spell was breaking, the delicate connection they'd established unraveling thread by thread.

"Look, Fred," the fisherman called down, his breathing uneven. "I don't think I can—"

He never finished the sentence. From behind his head, an organic yet utterly synthetic voice emerged; a perfect countermelody to Fingerhead's failing rustic charm. Mouthbottom, so often reduced to silence by his brother's dominance, was singing. Opera singing.

"What are you doing!?" Fingerhead yelled in a whisper, caught between astonishment and instinctive embarrassment.

"Helping," Mouthbottom replied, his voice maintaining the melody even as he spoke. "Please, brother. Let me help."

Fred sensed the emotional current: pride sparred with resentment in Fingerhead until it yielded to a submissive acceptance. The fisherman's shoulders slumped in acknowledgment of having no other choice.

"Fine," he muttered, then louder. "Fine! But you follow *my* lead."

With that, Fingerhead took a deep breath and rejoined the song. This time, instead of drowning out Mouthbottom, he deliberately left audible space for his brother. The effect was extraordinary. Where one voice had been impressive, two in harmony were transcendent.

Mouthbottom's tactic was to modulate his singing, adjusting to better complement Fingerhead's style while maintaining his own classical flair. The serpent, which had been charging its defenses, tilted with piqued interest. The electrical discharges began to dim.

Fred seized the opportunity, channeling his senses to enhance the harmony between the brothers. Strands of light intertwined and separated, dancing in patterns that mirrored the vocal interplay.

The song evolved, growing more complex as Fingerhead's jazz sensibilities blended with Mouthbottom's more grandiose inclinations, creating an otherworldly hybrid perfectly suited to their extraordinary audience of one.

Even the ship's sparks subsided, the trembling stilled, as if the vessel itself were hearing them out.

Fred found himself entranced, his special sense detecting layers of emotion he'd never expected from the crusty old grump. There was long-buried affection there, a bond suppressed but never truly broken.

It reminded him, with a pang both sweet and painful, of his relationship with George and Sue. His own affection for his siblings buried beneath anger. He became lost in these thoughts, his colors shifting to reflect not exactly change, but a willingness for it.

The creature consumed this emotional evolution with slithering delight. In that moment, they existed in perfect symbiosis. The serpent, the ship with its unlikely performers, and the

corresponding lights emanating from within.

Finally, at a good distance away from civilization, the music tapered to a slow, wistful resolve. Yet even as the sound vanished, its essence lingered. The serpent floated still; its eyes fixed on Fingerhead for a spell longer than he was comfortable with.

"I, uh," the fisherman coughed, "I guess... I'll call you? Sometime?"

The creature simply snorted as if it could understand him. Then, with a sinuous farewell, the serpent calmly followed an invisible path laid out by the stars.

Fingerhead waved after it with an exaggerated smile. Only when it was a speck against the cosmos did he allow himself to deflate. Letting out a dramatic exhale, he slumped back in his chair, the microphone dangling loosely from his fingers.

His four finger-tentacles became limp, which was Mouthbottom's own fatigue showing itself. The performance had hallowed them both.

Yet, victory tasted surprisingly sweet as the improvised stage descended back into the bottom room, welcoming him home with its familiar chaos of blinking lights and battered instruments.

"Gotta say, Mouth," Fingerhead leaned back in his chair. "That was adequate."

"Thank you, Fin," Mouthbottom replied, unmistakable warmth threading through him.

Fingerhead's fingers brushed against the cold metal of the flask in his pocket, ready to celebrate a job well done by downing the remaining contents in a single swig. This time, however, he hesitated.

He sensed Mouthbottom bracing for what always followed; the chemical retreat that separated them despite their shared body. With uncertainty gnawing at him, Fingerhead let his hand fall away.

His attention shifted instead to Fred, who stood at the viewport with hands clasped behind his back, his suit emitting a soft glow.

"Well, short stack," the fisherman drawled, "I believe that counts as a mission accomplished, or whatever you heroes call it."

"Yeah," Fred nodded. "I believe it does. Thanks to your... debatable talents."

Fingerhead chuckled. "Oh yeah? Well, for someone with no appreciation for the finer points of artistry, you managed to hold up your end reasonably well."

"And for a washed-up fisherman with questionable sanity and criminal tendencies, your performance was marginally less terrible than I expected."

The mention of official consequences brought a shadow across Fingerhead's features. His tentacles twitched as he plotted their course back to the bio-dome.

"Speaking of which," he ventured, "I suppose there'll be the usual boring formalities when we get back. Statements, accusations, possibly incarceration..."

Fred leaned against a nearby bulkhead, arms crossed over his chest. "About that," he said, measuring each word. "I think we can safely say that today's actions have earned you a certain... flexibility... regarding your past transgressions."

Fingerhead's hand stilled on the controls. "Come again?"

"I'm saying," Fred stepped forward, "that perhaps the authorities don't need to be reminded of certain outstanding warrants or problematic fishing practices." He gestured vaguely toward the space where the serpent had been. "You did just help save an entire colony, after all."

Fingerhead's eyes narrowed to calculating slits. "Are you saying what I think you're saying, short stack?"

Fred maintained a dignified expression, though his suit rippled with colors that betrayed a slight discomfort with the offer. "Let's just say that when I file my report, certain details might be overlooked."

"Wow," Fingerhead marveled, a slow smirk spreading across his face. "Look at the mighty Fred, bending the rules. What would your precious Galactic Friends think?"

"It wouldn't be the first time," Fred admitted with a shrug that aimed for nonchalance but landed closer to embarrassment.

This caught Fingerhead's attention fully. "Oh? Do tell." He swiveled in his chair to face him directly, crossing his legs.

Fred sighed; his paw tracing patterns on the console before him. "Remember that incident with the Hoo Hoo infestation...?" he asked, though fully knowing the answer already.

"How could I forget? Those little pests annoyed me for decades," Fingerhead recalled, sour with the memory. "I took matters into my own hands, your brother tackled me, oh, and when you let me stew in your holding cell while you heroes went on about compromises? My favorite part."

"That was a rather light punishment I'd say, considering your lust for murder at the time."

Fingerhead opened his mouth to protest, then closed it again, grudging acknowledgment replacing indignation. "Fair," he conceded. "Though I maintain my innocence by insanity. So, what's your point?"

"Yes, well," Fred continued, studying the ceiling with sudden interest, "there was also the matter of the missing survey equipment from the Galactic Science Institute. Equipment that somehow ended up installed in your ship's navigation system, if I recall correctly."

"Pure coincidence." Fingerhead waved dismissively. "I found that stuff floating in space. Salvage laws clearly state—"

"Salvage laws don't apply to equipment that was reported stolen less than twenty-four hours earlier," Fred's cadence was dry as dust. "And yet, somehow the investigation was redirected toward a gang of Martian smugglers operating in a completely different sector."

A slow, incredulous understanding dawned over Fingerhead. "That was you? You diverted the investigation?"

Fred shrugged again, this time with a hint of mischief that seemed entirely out of character. "The smugglers were more dangerous, objectively speaking. It was a matter of prioritizing resources. And the Hoo Hoos? I... may have been the one to look the other way when you fled."

"I'll be damned," Fingerhead droned, astonished. "All this time, I thought I was just exceptionally skilled at evading justice."

"You are exceptionally skilled at being a jerk," Fred corrected. "But occasionally useful. And occasionally..." he hesitated, fidgeting with the admission, "not entirely terrible company."

For once in his miserable life, Fingerhead was at a loss for words as he processed the compliment. However, the conversation met an obstacle when the cockpit shuddered violently, reminding them of the ship's condition. The control panel lit up the room in a constellation of angry red lights.

Without missing a beat, Fingerhead darted across the controls while Fred moved quickly to a secondary console. The viewscreen before them showed the bio-dome growing steadily larger. Around its periphery, they could make out the tiny shapes of rescue vessels attending to damaged fighters. The Galactic Friends' ship led the operation, evidence of Sue, Bob, and George's ongoing efforts to help the wounded.

"We'll make it," Fingerhead declared. "This old girl has been through worse."

Fred nodded, choosing to accept the assessment though the evidence pointed otherwise. He gazed out to see the bio-dome's entry port beckoning. A circular maw in the otherwise seamless structure, ringed with guiding lights that pulsed welcoming patterns.

Fred allowed himself a moment of calculation. They were mere minutes from the threshold. Once inside, the worst they faced was a rough landing. The vessel's remaining engine would be enough to prevent catastrophe.

It was precisely that moment of optimism that the universe chose to express its sense of humor. The ship's final engine died with a pitiful whine, all power draining from the vessel in a single heartbeat.

"No!" Fingerhead slammed his fist against unresponsive buttons. "Don't you die on me, baby!"

Fred's fingers flew across the backup systems, coaxing, commanding, but receiving nothing in return. Momentum alone carried them toward the entry point, their speed now against all odds without means to slow their approach.

His mind raced through possibilities, years of superhero training refusing to surrender to inevitability. They were too far for Sue to reach, moving too fast for interception. Communications dead, preventing even a final warning to those below.

The two aliens exchanged a glance that contained volumes.

Fred's thoughts filled with images of George and Sue. Not as they were now, but as they had been in happier times, before the Red Planet had carved its scars into their bond.

He knew they were out there together, safe, helping others without him. Perhaps that's as it should be. Maybe Sue *shouldn't* bring him back if the worst happened. The thought brought a strange peace amid the heartbreak.

Fingerhead, too, seemed lost in his own bubble. Eyes shut, though the hero could sense the mixed emotions behind them.

Perhaps in their shared mind, Fingerhead and Mouthbottom were exchanging words of comfort; a private communion Fred could sense but never truly translate.

At that moment, the distance to impact closed to nothing.

Chapter End Notes

now if only we could get a canon duet between the bros...

OH OH and also the concept of Fred letting Fingerhead get away with his crimes is canon btw! I shall paste an old quote from Ryan:

"If necessary Fred scoops them up and takes them in. He seemed to let Old Fingerhead go this time."

Chapter 14: Crash Out

The fishing vessel hit the bio-dome's outer shell with apocalyptic force. On land, earth and vegetation erupted in geysers as each impact slowed them until, with a final groaning protest, the vessel surrendered to stillness in a garden strewn with smoking debris.

In the silence that followed, only the hiss of ruptured coolant lines and the tinkling of falling glass disturbed the unusual calm. Emergency sprinkling systems responded efficiently to any untamed fires, deploying foam suppressants that suffocated the wreckage in iridescent bubbles.

Consciousness returned to Fred in uneven waves. First sound, then sensation, finally sight. The acrid taste of singed circuitry coated his tongue as his scarlet eyes fluttered open to a world turned sideways. He hung suspended in the remains of his seat harness.

"Ungh," he groaned, testing his limbs with a wince. Nothing broken, though every inch of him protested at the slightest movement.

"Fingerhead?"

Only the settling debris of creaking metal answered him.

With fumbling accuracy, he unclasped the harness and dropped unceremoniously to what had been the control room wall, now serving as its floor.

"Fingerhead! Mouthbottom!?"

The control room stood empty. Through a ragged opening, Fred could see the violent path of their arrival; shredded alloy scattered like breadcrumbs across the impact zone.

He scrambled out of the ship's carcass into blindingly bright artificial sunlight. His special sense stretched outward, searching for any emotional signature that might indicate life, but his scrambled abilities were slow to recover.

When minutes of increasingly frantic searching yielded nothing but wreckage and deepening dread, Fred stood in the center of the destruction, feeling lost at sea.

Then he spotted it. A splash of pink fabric peeking from beneath a large section of hull plating about thirty yards away. He desperately called the fisherman's name again, limping toward the spot with revived energy.

The hull section weighed more than expected. Fred's muscles strained as he attempted to lift it, managing only to shift it slightly before it settled back into place. Sweat beaded on his forehead as he tried again, bracing his compact legs more firmly against the soft earth.

"You... absolute... nuisance," Fred grunted between efforts. "Always... making things... difficult."

With a final herculean effort, he heaved the metal sheet aside. It landed with a clang, revealing what lay beneath.

"No..."

Fingerhead lay sprawled across crushed flowers, his blue skin ashen, almost gray in the harsh light. His eyes remained closed, chest disturbingly still. Fred dropped to his knees beside the inert form, eyelids covering the grief that etched deep lines into his features.

Yet something entirely different broke through the sorrowful scene. A barely perceptible upward twitch at the corners of his mouth. Fred was smiling.

The hero opened one eye to analyze Fingerhead's *'corpse'* with playful suspicion, fist planted on his hips. The stillness was too perfect, the positioning too dramatic. And there, almost gone unnoticed was the slightest twitch of a tentacle.

The conniving, blue-skinned menace was playing dead. No doubt plotting to leap up and startle him at the most inopportune moment. Fred's special sense had detected it. A faint mischievous undercurrent, carefully controlled but unmistakable.

Well, two could play at that game.

Fred's face transformed into a mask of exaggerated anguish. He raised his paws to the sky in theatrical despair, his voice rising to ensure the gathering crowd could hear every word.

"Oh, cruel universe!" Fred wailed, throwing himself across Fingerhead's seemingly lifeless body. "The greatest fisherman the galaxy has ever known, silenced forever! How will we go on without his wisdom, his sarcasm, his impeccable fashion sense!?"

Fred could feel Fingerhead's amusement growing stronger by the second. Even still, he maintained his death-like pose with impressive commitment.

Emboldened, Fred continued his performance with amplified flamboyance. "If only there was some way to bring him back!" he cried, draping an arm across his snout.

By now, the gathered colonists were exchanging puzzled glances. This was hardly the stoic behavior expected from a Galactic Superhero. Fred couldn't have cared less; the opportunity to turn the tables on Fingerhead was too delicious to resist.

"Wait!" Fred exclaimed, sitting up suddenly as if struck by divine inspiration. "I've read about this in ancient texts! There is one way to restore life to the recently deceased!"

"Only a true love's kiss can break this terrible sleep!" he declared with grave solemnity, his voice deepening for their audience. "I, as a sworn protector of the galaxy, must make this noble sacrifice!"

Fred puckered his lips exaggeratedly and began lowering his face toward Fingerhead's with excruciating slowness. He had never seen anyone break character so quickly.

Fingerhead's eyes snapped open, revealing shrunken pupils. "Touch me with those lips, short stack, and you'll be joining me in the afterlife," he growled, sitting up with surprising agility for someone supposedly dead.

Fred grinned, beaming authentic delight. "*HE LIVES!*" he exclaimed with the same over-the-top delivery.

The colonists broke into a mixture of applause, laughter, and unsettled murmuring. Some exchanged bemused glances, unsure how to parse the situation entirely.

Fingerhead stretched, wincing as various injuries made themselves known, though it was quickly disguised by laughter that mixed with Fred's. "Had you going there, didn't I?" he started, attempting to reclaim the upper hand. "Never expected you to be so worked up over little old me."

Fred's suit colors mellowed into a more refined palette as he steadied himself on his heels, arms folded but giving an air of high spirits. "Please," he scoffed. "I knew you were faking before I even found you."

"Nonsense," Fingerhead retorted, brushing crushed flower petals from his overalls. "You were completely fooled until my emotions were *violated*. I can see dry tears in those snitching little eyes of yours."

"In your dreams." Fred rose to his feet, offering a hand.

Fingerhead ignored it, choosing instead to hoist himself up using Fred's head as support. "I played you like a fiddle," he insisted, groaning as he tested his weight on an injured leg. "You can pretend it was an act from the start all you want. But deep down you were totally devastated."

"I was upset at the thought of all the paperwork involved in explaining how I lost someone who was technically in my custody," Fred countered. "Do you have any idea how many forms the Galactic Friends require for the deceased?"

"Oh, come now, you couldn't possibly convince me that you wouldn't just resort to sweet-talking dear Sue into resurrecting me anyway."

"Resurrection isn't quite that simple." Fred gestured sharply. "She would need approval from the Galactic Council before bringing anyone back. And, naturally, they're not exactly fans of those with... problematic histories."

"Ah, so I'm considered unworthy to you squeaky clean heroes, huh?" Fingerhead hardened. "And here I thought saving an entire bio-dome might have earned me a scrap of goodwill."

Fred's lips tightened. "Don't push it, Fingerhead. One good deed doesn't erase a lifetime of... of..."

"Of what, exactly? Of surviving? Of making my own way in a galaxy that doesn't give a damn about folks like me? Not all of us had the privilege of being groomed as perfect little

Galactic poster children, you know."

"Do we need to revisit the time you replaced an entire city's water supply with discount blue juice? How exactly was that related to your survival narrative?"

"That was ONE TIME!"

The two seethed in silence for a moment, only the rising sound of crowded colonists could divert their attention from one another. Several were whispering excitedly among themselves, pointing and identifying the unlikely heroes.

Fred immediately straightened, brushing dirt from his suit with his snout pointed high. What was before, now replaced by the dignified hero persona he always wore like armor for the public.

"Citizens," he addressed the crowd, voice clear and authoritative. "There is no cause for alarm. The threat has been neutralized, and emergency services are en route to secure the crash site."

Fingerhead coughed and crossed his arms. He scanned the crowd's edges with the instinctive calculation of escape routes that came from a lifetime of avoiding attention. But the colony elders approached them, bearing their traditional offerings; viscous blue mud in clay pots and garlands woven from delicate lilac flora.

"What are they doing?" Fingerhead hissed from the corner of his mouth.

"Their gratitude ritual." Fred smirked, crossing his arms behind his back. "Involves physical connection. And lots of touching."

"*Touching?*" Fingerhead's tentacles shot upward, pupils dilating as he stepped back but finding nowhere to retreat.

The aliens dipped their hands into the mud pots and pressed them against the heroes' bodies with reverent care. Their sacred medicinal clay, harvested from hallowed grounds, had a pleasant numbness that spread where it touched their injuries.

"I didn't ask to be part of a mud-cult," Fingerhead growled, though he remained statue-still as an elder traced healing patterns across his forehead. "This is exactly why I avoid heroism. Messy business."

A sound entirely contradicting the fisherman's scowl erupted behind his head, starting as a soft chuckle before blossoming into unbridled laughter. The colonists stopped at the unexpected noises.

"Please ignore him," Fingerhead sighed. "My brother finds inappropriate moments to express joy."

"It tickles!" Mouthbottom exclaimed. "They're healing us, Fin Fin! With their mud hands! Isn't that wonderful?"

Fingerhead closed his eyes, the picture of long-suffering patience. "Yes, Bottom. Absolutely wonderful. I'm overcome with joy."

Understanding Mouthbottom's presence, the colonists adjusted their ritual, reaching around to press mud-covered hands against his tentacles. This only amplified his delight and, proportionally, Fingerhead's grimace.

Then, a small child shyly stepped forward holding a necklace of twisted flowers. Fred smiled sweetly as he lowered himself to her level so she could drape it over his head. Beside him, Fingerhead received his own necklace, accepting it with the enthusiasm of someone being fitted for a noose.

There was something deeply satisfying about watching the fisherman endure praise like it was a form of torture. Squinting blue eyes caught Fred's widening grin.

"Enjoying yourself?"

"Immensely."

Fingerhead might have fired back with one of his trademark barbs, but his attention shifted suddenly to something beyond Fred's shoulder. "Oh, just in time," he sang. "It seems the official hero club has arrived to reclaim their lost lamb."

Fred turned, following Fingerhead's gaze to the colony's distant docking bay. His lip fell at the sleek silhouette of the Galactic Friends' ship descending through the artificial atmosphere.

"Right," he whispered, shoulders resigning.

He wandered off to rest against a decorative pillar. The colonists' celebration swirled around him, but his mind had already left, racing toward the inevitable confrontation awaiting him. All previous chaos—drunken altercations, serpent taming, and that garden-destroying crash landing—suddenly seemed like the easy part.

"So... your family." Fingerhead appeared beside him, displaying that rare perceptiveness that made him impossible to categorize.

Fred nodded slowly. "George, Sue and... her *fiance*."

"Ah, family drama. I'd take electric serpents over that any day."

Fred couldn't argue. He'd faced interstellar threats without flinching, but the thought of confronting his own failures as a brother made his knees weaken in ways no villain had ever managed.

"Well, kid," Fingerhead breathed, easing into a stretch. "Time to face the music."

"I guess you're right," Fred sighed.

As he turned to leave, a swarm of approaching engineers blocked Fred's path. Each one beamed with jittery enthusiasm as they addressed Fingerhead.

"Oh, great hero," exclaimed their apparent leader. "Your vessel saved our bio-dome with its magnificent harmonics! We wish to repair it as thanks."

Fingerhead's expression transformed from mild annoyance to absolute horror. "My vessel?" he repeated, as if the words were foreign. "You want to *touch* my ship?"

"Restore it," corrected another engineer. "Make it better than before!"

Fingerhead's eyelid twitched. "Um..."

"We've already begun collecting the necessary materials," interrupted a third, projecting a holographic inventory between them. "Quantum-resonant hull plating, harmonic drive couplings, even sound-responsive navigation arrays!"

"That sounds amazing!" Mouthbottom chimed.

Fingerhead snarled over his shoulder before turning back to the engineers with what appeared to be a strained effort of politeness. "While I'm... touched... by your offer..." He glanced down where a small alien had started rubbing more mud on his bitten arm. "My ship has very specific maintenance requirements that only I—"

"I should leave you to your adoring fans," came Fred's voice as he took a backward step toward the docking bay. "Time to face the music," he echoed with a smirk.

"What? Now? I mean—okay, but—"

"Try not to commit any crimes while I'm gone." Fred turned away, casually adjusting a flower garland that had slipped askew on his antlers.

He departed with determined strides, a natural sass returning with each step despite the slight limp of his leg. Halfway to his destination, Fred couldn't resist one last glance back. Fingerhead was being practically carried away by the overzealous engineers, his frantic protests falling on deaf ears. Mouthbottom, meanwhile, was clearly having the time of his life, chattering excitedly to anyone who would listen.

Fingerhead's final defiant cry could be heard across the dome, "*YOU KIDS ARE NUTS!*"

Fred chuckled. Some things, at least, never change.

Chapter 15: Interchange

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The Galactic Friends' ship gleamed in the docking bay, its pristine surfaces a stark rebuke to Fred's disheveled state. He paused at the bay's entrance, suddenly conscious of the dried mud caking his skin. The various fluids: mechanical oils and traces of Fingerhead's blood stained his uniform.

"FRED!" a deep voice hollered with glee, no doubt George's, who spotted him before he even stepped outside the ship. "You look terrible!"

Fred braced for his brother's inevitable tackle as he bounded forward with unmatched speed. He embraced Fred and soared upward, lifting him dozens of feet off the ground, squeezing with a fraction of the strength that could—and had—crushed spacecraft hulls.

"Easy, George," Fred wheezed, ribs audibly cracking. "I feel as terrible as I look, I'm afraid."

"Sorry!" George's grip softened immediately, floating down to release him. His face left no trace of resentment from their last heated interaction. "We saw the crash. Looked bad. Really bad. Like, *explosive* bad."

"It was... pretty bad," Fred chuckled awkwardly.

Past George, Fred's breathing hitched when he saw Sue cautiously tip-toe her way over to them. Bob remained leaning against the ship with crossed arms, tight lipped, clearly understanding this was not his moment to intervene.

"Fred." Sue hovered a hand over him. "You're hurt."

He looked down at himself, seeing the injuries through her eyes. The cuts and bruises not fully healed by the colonists' mud. He rubbed the scorch mark on his forehead, evidence of a near-death experience.

"It's nothing," he offered, then caught himself regretting the deflection. "I mean—yes, I suppose I'm pretty banged up..."

"Because of me," she lamented. "When George told us he couldn't get a hold of you... we thought..."

Fred's head lowered, remembering how he stormed off in anger with only silence left behind. He had muted his communicator before he boarded Fingerhead's ship, leaving his family to wonder if their last interaction would be one of conflict and hurt.

"I'm sorry," he blurted, speaking without preparation. "Not just for worrying you. For everything. For trying to forbid your marriage. For putting my pride above your happiness."

Sue stepped back and laid a hand over her beating heart, taken aback by his sudden passion.

"I was wrong," he continued, "I convinced myself I was protecting you, but I was really just protecting myself. From change. From losing control I had no right to enforce on my own family."

The words cost him, each syllable like a small shard of pride being harshly extracted. But as they emerged, he felt something unexpected; relief. "You don't need me protecting you. You never did. You're strong and capable and—" he glanced briefly at Bob, forcing himself to acknowledge the undeniable. "Loved by someone who sees your worth."

Sue's expression fell uncertain. "I will always need my family, Fred. But... I also need to discover who I am outside of our team too."

She reached for her brother's hands, brushing off a chunk of mud. "I'm not leaving forever. I'm just—exploring a different way to fulfill our mission. With Bob. Helping people on our own terms for a while."

He closed his eyes and nodded gingerly, throat tight as he swallowed. "I don't understand. But, I'm willing to try."

Fred turned to George, who had been fretting with his thumbs. "I also owe you an apology, George. I lashed out at you. That wasn't fair. You were just trying to keep us together, like you always do."

George brightened immediately, his capacity for grudges non-existent. "It's okay, Fred! You were sad. People say mean things when they're sad. I forgive you."

George offered another hug, and this time, Fred stepped into it willingly. George's heart drummed against him, steady and uncomplicated, a reminder of how simple life could be if you just let it.

"I'm such a dingus. I swear I'll work on it," Fred sighed as he extracted himself from the embrace. "Recent events have been somewhat educational."

"Educational? This I have to hear." Sue nudged.

"It's a long story." Fred glanced back toward the crash site, where Fingerhead was presumably still being accosted by enthusiastic engineers. "Involving cocktails, karaoke, drunken brawls..."

Sue offered an inquisitive smirk. "Sounds like quite the night."

"It was," he nodded, then sobered, "but it also made me realize something. I've been so focused on protecting our way of life, on maintaining our team exactly as it's always been. Maybe I need a change too."

"I'll come back." She asserted her gaze with glistening eyes. "We'll be together, stronger."

"I know," Fred replied, pleased to find he meant it. "Take the time you need. George and I will hold down the fort."

"Lots of bad guys to catch!" George chimed in helpfully. "And paperwork. *So much paperwork*," he groaned, stretching out his face with his hands.

When the laughter between them died down, Fred's smile remained warm as he fixed it on Sue. "There won't be a single second I won't miss you. I love you, sis."

Sue could withhold no longer, she threw her arms around him. "I love you too."

As they held each other, Fred spotted Bob from Sue's shoulders. The explorer remained patient at a distance, seemingly fixated on the polished ground as he pretended not to listen to them.

"Bob," Fred called, marching up to him with hands stoically clasped behind his back. "I owe you an apology as well. I judged you unfairly, based on my own fears and suspicions rather than your actions."

Bob's pupils shifted side-to-side, as if unsure who exactly it was being addressed. After assessing Fred carefully, he fidgeted with the hem of his sleeve and fixed his posture.

"I understand protective instincts," Bob began. "Sue means everything to me, just like she means everything to you and George. We're on the same side."

Fred's instinct was to dispute this, to clarify that Bob could never understand what Sue meant to them, but he swallowed the retort. Letting go, he reminded himself, was uncomfortable by definition.

"We share a common interest in her happiness," Fred conceded. "And I... recognize that you contribute to that. The least I can do is give you a chance."

It wasn't a ringing endorsement, but it was honest. Bob seemed to appreciate this, offering a small grin. "That's all I ask."

Fred extended an arm, the gesture perhaps a bit too formal. "Welcome to the family then," he spouted as Bob shook his hand. "Fair warning: it includes George singing in the shower, mandatory movie nights, and occasional life-threatening missions."

"Sounds perfect," Bob replied, his smile growing more confident.

Sue watched them with undisguised bewilderment. Her attention darted between her brother and her fiancé, unable to believe what she was seeing.

"Group hug!" George declared, not so much suggesting as announcing an imminent reality.

George gathered them all into a tight circle. Fred found himself pressed uncomfortably close to Bob, their mutual discomfort evident in their stiff postures. But for Sue's sake, neither pulled away.

"So," Bob eased when George released them. "Sue had a vision of you and Old Fingerhead getting along, saving the day together. I assume there's quite the story to be told?"

Fred gave a courteous nod. "The colonists are celebrating our heroism, so there's bound to be refreshments involved. I could be persuaded to share the details over food."

"Food!" George exclaimed, as if it were the most brilliant suggestion he'd ever heard. "I'm starving! Fighting a giant snake works up an appetite!"

Sue laughed. "You're always hungry, George."

"Growing boy," he shrugged and patted himself with dignity.

They moved as a group toward the bio-dome's central hub, where the colonists' celebration gathered momentum. Fred found himself walking beside Sue, close enough to speak privately.

"I don't expect your trip to be a long one," he murmured, stretching his voice an octave lower. "Because no matter how exciting Bob's adventures might be, eventually you'll miss *George's pancakes*."

Sue's jaw dropped. "That's fighting dirty."

"Perhaps," he snickered.

When they reached the bustling hub of the bio-dome, the colonists whisked them away to where a grand feast awaited them. There the day transitioned from the bright hues of morning to the softer tones of afternoon, and after the celebrations came to an end, the family merrily followed their guide through the settlement.

They were led to a cozy lodging where they could finally rest their weary bodies. Fred, however, allowed himself to lag behind, his footsteps slowing until he was a few paces back.

"You guys go on ahead!" he called out to his family with a wave of his hand. "I gotta take care of something real quick."

Without waiting for a response, he turned on his heel and briskly made his way toward the ship repair yard. He trotted down a pebbled path, admiring the scenery. The last rays of the colony's artificial sunset painted the bio-dome in strokes of burnt orange and deep purple that wrapped around the transparent ceiling.

Upon entering the yard, a faint mechanical whirr caught his attention. He recognized it as the unmistakable sound of a ship's pre-flight sequence initiating. Fred jogged to the source of the noise. There, at the far end of broken down ships, was Fingerhead's fishing vessel.

The colonists had worked quickly. The ship gleamed in the fading light, restored to a condition Fred suspected was better than it had been in decades. Fingerhead was halfway up the access ramp, attempting to board it before an all too familiar voice stopped him in his tracks.

"Leaving without saying goodbye? That's cold, even for you."

The fisherman didn't respond. For a moment, Fred thought he might simply continue and depart without acknowledgment. Instead, he resigned a sigh, turning to face him.

"Not big on goodbyes, kid," he replied, his perpetually tired eyes finding Fred's across the space between them. "They tend to be sentimental affairs that delay the inevitable."

Fred stepped onto the ramp and his shadow stretched long behind him as though reluctant to follow. "It just doesn't seem very fair," he started. "You didn't show up to the celebration feast. But I suppose you were busy overseeing your ship's restoration."

"That was a regrettable compliance made under duress. I was outnumbered by annoying engineers with questionable taste in interior design."

"So, that's it then?" Fred's tone slipped to reveal something more personal beneath. "After everything, you just... leave? Back to fishing on some isolated asteroid or something?"

"That was the arrangement, wasn't it? Temporary alliance for the *greater good*, followed by a return to our respective corners of the galaxy. You to your restrictive heroics, me to my solitary retirement. The natural order restored."

"Yeah, sure," Fred sighed. "Natural order."

As the silence stretched, Fred found himself unable to speak. He had intercepted Fingerhead without planning what he actually wanted to say. Now, faced with his imminent departure, he felt a strange reluctance to see him go.

"What do you want from me, Fred?" Fingerhead blurted, discharging something near hostile. "A promise to be better? To join your merry band of do-gooders and sing *kumbaya*?"

Fred shook his head, a pesky grin forming. "No, I think we both know that's not happening."

"Then what?" Fingerhead pressed, curiosity vaguely entering his disinterested expression.

Fred hesitated, searching his internal vocabulary to express something he didn't fully understand himself.

"I don't know."

Fingerhead studied him, the four tentacles on his head moving in a pattern that Fred had come to recognize as deep thought. "Well..." he breathed, "if my luck with the law has taught me anything, I'm sure we'll see each other again."

"Does that mean misdemeanors will be your way of keeping touch?" Fred teased.

"Careful, short stack. That kind of talk leads to expectations, and expectations lead to disappointment. I'm not in the business of maintaining connections."

"Neither am I," Fred countered. "My professional calling doesn't exactly leave room for social calls outside the regulatory framework."

A scoff, something that could have been a laugh escaped the sailor. "Then what are you suggesting? We become pen pals? Exchange holiday greeting cards while you pretend not to notice my occasional wrongdoings?"

"I'm not suggesting anything." Fred raised his paws in surrender. "I'm just... acknowledging a reality. You're not just another file in our database. You're..."

"Don't say it," Fingerhead warned. "Whatever sappy designation you're about to apply to me, I reject it preemptively."

"You're a person," Fred continued unfazed. "A person who has inspired me greatly."

The fisherman's grimace twisted into disgust. "I have no interest in corrupting a superhero, Fred. Whatever moral crisis you're experiencing isn't my responsibility."

"That's not what I'm getting at," Fred insisted. "I think there's *good* inside you, Fingerhead. You know, besides Mouthbottom."

"Thank you, kindly!" Mouthbottom sang.

Something within Fingerhead lit up defensively. Perhaps there was a glint of recognition; a truth he'd always deny. Behind them came the sounds of footsteps to break his thoughts. Multiple sets were approaching in their direction. The voices, Fred recognized instantly.

"That's my cue to depart," Fingerhead said, striding toward his ship's interior. "I've vastly exceeded my daily quota for heroic association."

"Stay," Fred blurted, reaching out without thinking. "Just... just for a moment. Meet my family properly. Not as enemies or reluctant allies, but as..."

"If you say *friends*..." Fingerhead's arms crossed with the weariness of one who'd already made a decision he regretted.

"I was going to say 'acquaintances of circumstantial significance.'"

"Whatever," the fisherman resigned, stepping down from the ramp. As Fred's family came into view, Fingerhead prepared himself for the interaction with a slump of his shoulders.

"There you are!" George shouted, then noticed the blue alien and perked up. "Oh! It's Fingerman!"

Fingerhead growled through his teeth. Strike one clearly crossed already.

"George," Fred scolded. "His name is Old Fingerhead. Fingerhead, you know my brother George."

"We all know him very well," Sue butted in gracefully. "Last I checked, he was number three on our *most-wanted* list."

"Number three?" Fingerhead placed his hands on his hip. "Who's the top two?"

"The Wallpaper Twins," Bob supplied, then immediately shrunk with regret once Fingerhead's attention shifted to him.

"Those amateurs?" he scoffed. "Their idea of a heist is stealing decorative patterns from unsecured databases. Those guys pose the most threat to the Galactic Friends?"

"Oh, no," Sue corrected diplomatically. "That list is for petty crimes. Fred doesn't like to leave anyone out."

Fred cleared his throat pointedly. "Perhaps we could move on to what is supposed to be a civil introduction?"

Fingerhead raised his chin at him. "You're the one who insisted I converse with your family unit. Don't blame me for inquiring insight."

"Speaking of insight," Sue hummed, "I hear you helped my brother save the colony."

"Unfortunately."

Sue giggled. "You know, you're exactly as Fred described you in his mission reports." She put on her best nasally impression of her brother: "*Irritatingly evasive and pathologically incapable of speaking without sarcasm.*"

Fingerhead squinted. "Reports, you say?"

"Volumes," Sue winked. "Very detailed. Very thorough."

"It's standard procedure!" Fred stomped forward and pointed a finger high above himself. "Comprehensive documentation of repeat offenders is regulatory best practice."

Sue's smirk widened. "Including a three-page analysis of his body language?"

"That was relevant to—" Fred began, then cowered at Fingerhead's questioning gaze. "Criminal profiling."

A bubbling warmth entered the songstress as she glanced between the two. Then, to everyone's surprise, she stepped forward and extended a hand toward their former adversary.

"We're having dinner next week," she chirped. "In our headquarters, before Bob and I depart to the Andromeda Galaxy. You should join us."

Fingerhead stared at her outstretched hand as if it might be concealing a deadly weapon. "Dinner," he repeated flatly. "With the Galactic Superheroes."

Sue nodded. "That's the proposal."

"Why?"

"Because apparently there's more to you than you lead on. And because any being who can work so well with Fred to save the day like that, I consider worthy."

George bounced enthusiastically. "Plus, I'm a great cook!"

Fingerhead side-eyed Fred, searching for confirmation that this wasn't some elaborate joke. Fred merely shrugged, equally surprised by the invitation.

"I will... *consider* it. Though I can't promise I'll be proper company."

"We wouldn't expect otherwise," Sue replied.

"Thank you for the kind invitation, milady! We'll bring dessert!" came Mouthbottom's delighted voice.

"Bottom!" Fingerhead hissed. "I did not say you could—"

"*WHOA*," George hollered. "Your tentacles can talk?! That's so cool!"

"Why thank you! The name's Young Mouthbottom!"

"Well," Sue brightened. "That's one thing not mentioned in Fred's records."

"I never even knew he was there," Fred stated passively. "Found out this morning."

The space around the fisherman erupted with reactions; Sue and Fred discussing the biology, George hitting it off with Mouthbottom, Bob scribbling frantically in his discovery notebook. Fingerhead shrank back, the shadow on his face intensifying.

Then, abruptly, his eyes widened with realization. "Wait," he said, patting his overalls. "I almost forgot..." His hand disappeared into a hidden pocket, emerging with something small that reflected the sunset's dying light.

Sue gasped. Fred felt his antlers instinctively straighten. Between Fingerhead's fingers lay the unmistakable insignia ring he had stolen the night before.

"I believe this belongs to you."

The songstress looked between him and the ring, baffled. "You had my ring? How?"

"I stole it," he stated matter-of-factly, as if discussing the weather rather than admission of theft. "Your brother had it with him. Caused quite the fuss."

Fred winced. "When I realized he'd taken it, I was furious. That's why—"

"He bit my arm," Fingerhead finished groggily. "Which will leave a dashing scar no doubt."

George gasped dramatically. "We can be scar buddies!" he shouted, lifting up his shorts to reveal faded electric branches up his legs.

"George, please," Fred scolded automatically. "We're in public."

But Sue remained fixed on the ring in Fingerhead's possession. "So why are you returning it now? Why return it at all?"

He met her scanning gaze, and for once, there was no deflection in his eyes. "Because it wasn't mine to take," he spoke softly. Then, straightened himself. "Plus, it's too recognizable to fence. Bad business to keep it."

Without further explanation, Fingerhead took Sue's hand and slid the ring onto her finger next to her engagement ring. The gesture was surprisingly delicate.

"Thank you," Sue breathed, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear as she admired the recovered treasure.

Bob stepped beside his fiance to look over the ring, coughing in his fist. "That's, uh, very noble of you. Returning something... you stole."

Fred couldn't help the surge of satisfaction at the interaction. It was petty, perhaps, but sensing the typically confident explorer squirm with distrust felt like a small victory.

The moment was broken by George. "This is so nice! Everyone's getting along! We should take a picture!"

"Absolutely not," Fingerhead and Fred said in perfect unison. They glanced at each other, both instantly recoiling in disgust.

Sue laughed, the sound melting the last trace of social friction. "Okay, I think we should let Fingerhead escape before George suggests group activities."

"Couldn't agree more." Fingerhead was already drifting toward his ship. "This has been... surprisingly non-terrible. But I have pressing business elsewhere. Fishing. Away from everyone."

"Dinner." Sue waved. "Next week. Don't forget."

"I'm sure Mouthbottom will remind me," Fingerhead dismissed. "I don't look forward to it."

"Likewise," Fred slyly replied.

The fisherman paused, his frown secretly translating a grin through Fred's senses. "Until next time, then."

With a final nod to Fred and a knowing wink at Bob—who rubbed his neck in discomfort—Fingerhead disappeared into his ship. Moments later, the engines hummed more harmoniously than before; one of the colonists' engineering improvements. Then the vessel rose and streaked away, leaving only a faint trail of light against the night-setting dome.

Sue proceeded to Fred's side, and for a little while, they star-gazed in quiet. His special sense absorbed the serenity around him like a breath of fresh rosy air.

Like tectonic plates realigning after an earthquake, something had shifted. New possibilities had emerged from the rubble of old certainties and for the first time, Fred was ready to embrace them.

That is, until the colony's central communication system blared: "Attention all residents and visitors. We regret to inform you that our primary water purification system has been compromised. Someone has replaced our filtration crystals with what appears to be... blue rock candy?"

The group glanced over each other with puzzled faces, before settling into shared exasperation.

Until next time, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

IT'S DONE. MY FIRST FIC COMPLETED!!

To anyone out there who took their time to read this nonsense, I hope it was at least entertaining and perhaps scratches the itch for GSH content. It's been so much fun expanding these characters and their dynamics. I have more in the works, and perhaps a sequel with many character arcs... any feedback, no matter how simple, will only speed up the process. ;)

ALSO, suggestions for RBG story ideas are welcome btw, you can inbox a request anytime. but anyway, thanks for reading! Gotta go now, byeee!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!